

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 091 670

CS 001 129

AUTHOR Mork, Theodore A., Ed.  
TITLE Reading and Individualizing in the Language Arts; Proceedings of the 1971 and 1972 Summer Reading Conferences at Western Washington State College, Reading Center.  
INSTITUTION Western Washington State Coll., Bellingham.  
PUB DATE Jun 73  
NOTE 78p.  
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$4.20 PLUS POSTAGE  
DESCRIPTORS Beginning Reading; Childhood Attitudes; Childrens Literature; Composition (Literary); \*Elementary Education; \*Individualized Instruction; Individualized Reading; \*Language Arts; Open Education; \*Reading; Reading Instruction

## ABSTRACT

Edited versions of papers presented at the 1971 and 1972 Western Washington State College conferences on the teaching of reading and language arts comprise the contents of this book. Titles of the papers are (1) "Reading Alone," (2) "Individualized Language Activities and the Nurture of Individuality," (3) "Making the Beginning of Reading a Significant Experience," (4) "Children's Views of Language," (5) "Write to Read," (6) "You, A Creative Reader," (7) "Individualized Reading," (8) "Using the Best of All Approaches for Teaching Reading," (9) "Personalizing Reading Instruction," (10) "The Open Classroom and Reading," and (11) "Reading and Children's Literature." (JM)

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Western Washington State College

READING AND INDIVIDUALIZING  
IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS  
PROCEEDINGS OF THE 1971 AND 1972  
SUMMER READING CONFERENCES

*Edited by  
Theodore A. Mork  
June, 1973*

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Preface

Each year the Reading Center, a division of the Education Department at Western Washington State College, sponsors a conference centered on the teaching of reading and language arts. This publication includes edited versions of the papers presented by the speakers at the conferences of 1971 and 1972.

The 1971 conference theme was "Improving Reading Comprehension." The 1972 theme was "Reading and Individualizing in the Language Arts." Since the 1972 theme was the broader of the two, it was chosen as the title for this volume. The articles by Darrow, Downing, and Hymes represent the 1971 conference, with those by Artley, McCracken, Mork, Myers, and Sebesta resulting from the 1972 conference. It is hoped that these articles will provide a sense of excitement and enthusiasm for teaching children and a source of helpful information in philosophy and techniques in teaching reading and language arts.

Theodore A. Mork

To my friend, B.J.  
With my best wishes  
and my thanks.

8/1/73

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## READING ALONE

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National concern about reading has its hypochondriacal side. The pulse is still warm and beating, but there is an undefined illness. Part of the trouble is vagueness about what we mean by reading failure and reading competence. Are we a generally healthy reading public but with a segment of the population unable to read? If so, the problem is to bring everyone up to the happy norm. Or does the total population fall short of ideal reading competence and performance? To put the matter another way, is our problem one of achieving functional literacy or what Francis S. Chase termed "higher literacy" skills<sup>2</sup>? The two concepts may not be points along the same line. They may be quite different.

In October of 1971 a popular news magazine suggested that twenty-five per cent of the population is functionally illiterate<sup>1,4</sup>. The data are probably based on a Harris poll which found that one-fourth or more of its sample had trouble completing five basic application forms, each requiring functional reading and direction-following<sup>1,3</sup>. By implication the magazine diagnosed the difficulty as confusion over whether to teach reading by "phonics" or "look-say." This appears to be a monstrous over-simplification. At about the same time, *Phi Delta Kappan* reported American illiteracy of less than one per cent, about half the incidence of a decade ago<sup>4</sup>.

What do we mean by functional literacy? Is it ability to read fourth-grade level materials? Completion of five years of schooling? Ability to fill out forms? These and other criteria have been used and sometimes juxtapositioned to support pride or cry havoc. And what comprises higher literacy? Authorities here point to skills of inferential, interpretive, and critical reading. But definitions of reading competence are not consistently established.

This is not so serious a matter if acquisition of reading skill actually consists of a series of tasks achieved, arranged in a hierarchy. Beginning reading *may* consist of habit-formation, the association of grapheme and phoneme patterns leading to what is now commonly called decoding. From there one might progress to literal comprehension and hence to those higher stages of interpretation and critical reading. Competence could then be defined at some level of the hierarchy of skills. The majority of reading instruction materials—for example, those discussed by Aukerman in *Approaches to Beginning Reading*<sup>1</sup>—are based on this assumption.

But the assumption is a doubtful one. In a word, it is atomistic<sup>10</sup>. Early reading experience is consigned to habit-formation by such an assumption, with cognitive learning postponed. Some early childhood experts brand this a kind of deprivation. Their concern is all the more justified if we accept the idea that early attitudes, interests, and motives are lasting, that they establish the theme for later values and valuing.

Psycholinguists also have come to doubt the assumption. Kenneth Goodman<sup>5</sup>, Frank Smith<sup>15</sup>, Ronald Wardhaugh<sup>17</sup>, and others see a totality of language at work even in the earliest stages of learning to read. The process of associating vocal or subvocal symbols with visual symbols may require, even at the beginning, recourse to cue-reduction by way of comprehension. In linguistic terms even the decoding act requires interplay between the surface structure and the deep structure of language.

If these observations are true, then we must question whether a neatly packaged hierarchical series of tasks will insure reading competence. Provision for mastery of each task may still find us lacking, for the sum of the parts may not comprise the whole. Instead, we might seek to define competence or to define the quality of performance of a mature reader. Then we might consider which of the facets of competence and performance must necessarily be included throughout all phases of instruction. Such effort leans more heavily on goals than objectives, on longitudinal considerations rather than short-term ones, on total education rather than expediency.

One such facet of reading competence has to do with *autonomy*. Gray and Rogers in their monumental study of the mature reader<sup>6</sup> did not use that term, but it describes many of their findings. The idea was explored by David Riesman and his associates in *The Lonely Crowd*<sup>12</sup>. We may deduce that autonomous reading is one manifestation of the autonomous individual. He is not blinded by inner-direction which indicates unquestioning acceptance of traditional values; nor is he other-directed in the sense of total acquiescence to the dictates of the social group and the mass media. He is neither guilt-ridden over failure to produce nor anxiety-ridden over fear of failure to conform. He is able to rise above inner-direction and other-direction. He maintains some freedom for making up his own mind. He experiences the zest derived from knowing that he has some control over his fate.

The autonomous reader may likewise seek freedom for *decision-making*. He reads to obtain data to help him make up his own mind. When data conflict, he searches further or he judges authority or weighs the conflicting evidence more carefully. He also reads to enlarge his life space, which is another way of saying that he reads to satisfy and widen his *curiosity* even when the information may appear to have little relevance to his decision-making. He reads, too, for *sanctuary*, finding

reading a means of respite in his conquest of the universe.

The autonomous reader's motivation is predominantly intrinsic. He reads for help; to find out; to gain surcease.

Now, this concept of autonomous reading can be a goal to guide us in defining reading competence. It may be too high-minded, too general, not sufficiently operational, and out of step with recent strategies of objective-setting, but in the long history of progress goals have determined objectives and not the other way around. What is more, the autonomous reader concept seems intrinsically bound up with all reading, including reading instruction. It is a matter to be fostered and fed. No one is likely, at the end of an inner-directed or other-directed reading instruction sequence, to design an ultimate reading packet for altering a pupil's behavior into autonomous reading.

One suggestion for fitting a strand toward autonomy into the entire reading sequence is to teach children early *what reading is*. Professor Johns of Northern Illinois University investigated elementary pupils' answers to the questions "What is reading?" and "What do you do when you read?"<sup>8</sup> None of the 96 primary children in the same mentioned meaning as an outcome of reading. In the entire sample, which included intermediate-age children, only four per cent "viewed reading as a meaning-getting process"<sup>9</sup>.

It would be interesting to carry the investigation to England, where the widely used *Ladybird* books<sup>11</sup> explicitly discuss why we read and what reading means. One might also examine American reading instructional materials with this variable in mind. Apparently, we have not succeeded in helping children discover the information, and the adult models of reading in our society are not sufficient to be effective in this respect.

Second would be increased attempts to teach that *reading has utility*. One college student remarked that his first and best reading materials were a Monopoly game. "Do not pass GO" and "Take a walk on Boardwalk" may be the secret weapon of the reading business. So, too, might be the magnificent thirty-two words that comprise Pat Hutchins' *Rosie's Walk*<sup>7</sup>; the antic Fester, Fister, Faster, and Foster of Tomi Ungerer's *I Am Papa Snap and These Are My Favorite No Such Stories*<sup>16</sup>; and the welcome rise in quality and quantity of expository books for children.

Third is a controversy over method and place. Miriam Wilt<sup>18</sup> has observed, "Reading, however one wishes to define it, is not an act that can be performed in a group. Reading is communication between an author and an individual" (p.445). True, we share the outcomes of

reading. We discuss, dramatize, and in other ways combine our efforts as a result of what we read. But reading is done alone. It is not a round-the-circle conference.

We have tended to confine reading instruction to the school; our hope is that the public will continue its reading outside the school. Attention to the need may come too late. The staggering decline in voluntary reading at the pre-adolescent level and beyond may partly result from lack of attention to reading outside the school in the years of early and middle childhood.

For these reasons, we may question whether schools as we have conceived them are the single best place to teach reading. Not if school environment prohibits reading alone. Not if it builds a wall beyond which reading is a stranger. Perhaps reading can be more substantially taught in the home.

True, many homes are not conducive to learning to read. True, many of us have found the pitfalls of parents whose attempts to teach reading result in anguish. Still, we may find that certain effective procedures for teaching reading may be taught to the layman. These would include use of guiding questions before, not after, the reading act. The layman can learn to frame questions and activities promoting interpretation and evaluation. Decoding skills—their balance and sequence—may also be transmitted in this way. For example, the layman can learn the importance of helping to decode new words in context before and after reading, not interrupting the flow of reading to teach a lesson or deliver a lecture on phonics or structural analysis. Even the rudimentary elements of diagnosis and placement with the informal reading inventory might be given to the layman for use in the home<sup>3</sup>.

Whether this move is feasible or desirable is open to question. In the interest of developing autonomous readers, it might be worth the attempt. Our goal would be functional or higher literacy, depending on a clearer statement of competence than we now possess. And the goal would include autonomous reading. Without this, reading could be like the company parlor in the Kansas farmhouses of a few decades back: proudly owned, nicely furnished—but never, never used.

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## INDIVIDUALIZED LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES AND THE NURTURE OF INDIVIDUALITY

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School can be many things to many children. Some recent studies<sup>1</sup> suggest that mostly it's a place where you don't talk; where you sit down and write what you are told to write when you are told to write it; where you listen quietly for directions and read instructions carefully in order to do the work properly and finish on time. As one young man explained his desire to complete his assignment, "I want to get it over with; you see, I have other things to do besides go to school." Even further, school is a place where you don't question the work you are asked to do and certainly not why you should do it.

If children were designing behavioral objectives as they experience them in school, no doubt they would, for one, specify the silent classroom; to be evidenced by no signs of children conversing with neighbors, but many—thirty or more—signs per hour of turn-taking with hands raised for teacher recognition to speak, read or write.

### *Language in a Closed Structure*

School life parameters like these suggest a passive, conforming language environment, one which sadly restricts and constricts the growth of language facility. When speech is largely confined to teacher-controlled group recitation periods; when reading and writing are heavily managed by definitive questions of who, what, when and where to be answered in complete sentences, one unrelated to the other; and when listening is mostly considered to be property of teacher talk, then indeed language in the classroom gets cramped, strained, pinched and shrunken—closed off from the real world of communication. Not only is there reduced communication, especially in the sense of cultural transmissions; but the other basic components of language functions—imagination and intellectuality—are diminished also<sup>2</sup>.

Such a diminished environment too often leads to wholesale dependence upon volumes of controlled practice sheets and other contrived, repetitious materials designed merely to move the child across and up the ladder of isolated language skills. Children who do not respond well, who do not turn out to be high scorers stimulate much worry if not apathy or rejection.

### *Goals for Language Development*

Perhaps it's time to resist the righteous temptation to diagnose

what's wrong with children who do not do well in the system, and instead begin to diagnose the system: to ask what's wrong with our school goals and objectives for language development—not merely how they are stated but what they mean for significant living<sup>3</sup>.

Attainment of secondary skills by scope and sequence accretion may well be the wrong goal to concentrate upon. Unless we are merely interested in mechanical efficiency, and not concerned with grasping the vitality and interrelationship of language, literature and people, such a goal is meaningless. Perhaps a much more meaningful goal is the identification of self and others through the mode of language. With this goal the primary life skills of language are not reading, writing, speaking, listening—these are secondary—but thinking, exploring, imagining, expressing in terms of seeking understanding and enhancement of self and others<sup>4</sup>.

Interpersonal relationships grow when children continually engage one another in dialogue encounters, using creative listening and creative responding<sup>5</sup>. Real communication increases when children continually attempt to translate embryonic feelings and hunches into communicable forms of awareness<sup>6</sup>. Without these transactional experiences, the usefulness of language in relating to others, in harmonizing the inner-outer worlds of being is likely to be obscured, if not lost.

To achieve humanistic goals and objectives in language development calls for not closed, but open structures for learning<sup>7</sup>.

### *Language in Open Structure*

Like an open road, the open structured school environment ostensibly beckons every child to discover himself and his humanness through song, poetry, storytelling, storywriting, literature-reading, drama, painting, sculpturing and other forms of expression, verbal and nonverbal. Childhood is viewed as the appropriate time for playful, unhurried and satisfying encounters with language. It becomes the time for exploring the mysteries, the complexities, the beauty of language structure for harnessing imagination and thought.

The content for language growth in such a setting emerges from experiencing and its subsequent challenge to be restructured, reshaped in reflection<sup>8</sup>. The latter task often demands a discipline not usually found in copywork or sterile language exercises. Language skills and understandings grow in the totality of effort as the child uses language to share his uniqueness, his individuality with others.

### *Individuality in Open Structure*

Individuality, of course, involves freedom to choose and responsi-

bility to seek fulfillment of choices made<sup>9</sup>. In this sense the nurture of individuality is more than provision for individual differences. While both concepts imply differentiation of materials, activities, expected levels of achievement and sometimes differentiation of goals and expected outcomes, the stress upon individuality underscores the significance of freedom *with responsibility*. The emphasis is upon practice of choice-making and commitment-making to follow through one's choices. Materials, activities, expected outcomes, evaluation and, especially, goal-setting all involve the learner who presumably has the right to make decisions and grow by facing the consequences.

Understandably then, the use of open structure as a means for nurturing individuality stems from such assumptions about children and teachers as these:

1. Children come to school already equipped with some kind and degree of language proficiency which can be strengthened as it is used, shared and valued for its revelation of the child's uniqueness.
2. Children come to school with sufficient intelligence to make—or learn to make—some kind and degree of choices about forms and contents of language to be used in individual communication efforts with others.
3. Children will experience a broadening and deepening base of choices when the environment supports and stimulates a wide range and deep quality of functional language experiences.
4. Teachers have sufficient intelligence and sensitivity to be able to guide children at meaningful, mutually-accepted growth-points.

Teachers who accept open structure do not resort to permanent grouping plans or general labeling of children's abilities. They do not rely upon graded materials for "coverground" nor grade-level expectations for stepping ground. They do, however, take responsibility for planning and organizing the open structure to be practiced in their classrooms.

#### *Planning for Open Structure*

Since the structure is open, not nonexistent, it needs to be planned, delicately, but determinedly<sup>10</sup>.

*First, the teacher plans for a wide range of materials.* Not only equipment like typewriters, tape recorders, language masters, viewers,

recordplayers, printing presses, filmstrip and film projectors, but even more important, supplies of 'raw' materials—paint, clay, art paper, newsprint, felt pens, watercolor pens, flannel boards, chalk boards, etc., as well as assortments of print-books, paperbacks, readers, study prints, children-authored homemade booklets, dictionaries, encyclopedias, word games and so on—are assembled, not necessarily all at once but more and more over a period of time. In this way the school environment deliberately includes possibilities for language arts choices beyond what chance alone might provide.

*Second, the teacher, along with the group, plans the management of the materials.* Discussions of what is available, additional materials needed, time and space for work, ways to handle and use materials—all these and other aspects of the physical environment—are dealt with as teaching-learning opportunities. As new materials and projects are planned, new problems arise. New decisions need to be made and further discussions are called for. In this way children become involved and committed to use of the environment as part of their responsibility, and in so doing, learn to function less dependently upon the teacher.

*Third, the teacher and children plan alternatives for choices.* During planning sessions some children have clear plans in mind and can state them. Intentions may be orally expressed like Tom's: "I'm going to write a make-believe story about a baby rabbit and paint a picture to go with it; I'll work first at the writing table, so I can use the dictionary and Easter-word lists." Or intentions may be recorded as young Lisa's:

|                              |                                               |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Name                         | <u>LISA</u>                                   |
|                              | <u>Plans For My Project</u>                   |
| What                         | <u>A Filmstrip about cat</u>                  |
| Why                          | <u>Be cas I want to lene a dbout cat</u>      |
| Who With                     | <u>On BDe Jes Me</u>                          |
| How                          | <u>By gating a Filmstrip and gating Books</u> |
| Do You need help?            | <u>I Do't No</u>                              |
| Who do you want to help you? | _____                                         |
| Miss Saunders:               |                                               |

I want to Have a Book about cars and of filmstrip about cats.

FROM LISA <sup>11</sup>

One goal sometimes, upon completion, leads to another related one. For example, after completing his story on rabbits, Tom decided to have it evaluated so he could rewrite it for inclusion in the 'Class Book of Easter Stories.'

At times children, perhaps all children, need to 'mess' with materials and ideas before making up their minds. They may only state a general preference for working somewhere, like at the art table or at the reading center, but have no specific goal which can be stated. A child choosing to go to the reading center may spend some time selecting a book before settling down with intent to read it. Only after reading it might he then develop a subsequent goal to prepare it for audience reading or use it in a special report given to the "Book Club." In any case, planning sessions are used by teachers and children to anticipate and clarify some of the specific alternatives to be considered, especially for those children who are uncertain about plans.

Just what one could choose to do at the writing table is appropriately explored by the teacher with the group or sub-group, or even in conference with an individual or two. Choices might include, for young children:

- Make an ABC dictionary
- Make a list of words you know how to spell
- Work on "Pattern Chart" (Find more words to add to our columns)
- Write a sentence to go with your painting
- Write a story
- Add a page to the 'Phonics Book'
- Take a spelling test (on tape)
- Tell story of our trip by "film strip"

And for older children:

- Work on a "book" written from your experiences
- Develop a chart of literature forms
- Develop a comic strip or cartoon for our newspaper
- Write a letter to \_\_\_\_\_
- Build a similes and metaphors list
- Create a slogan for the PTA Toothbrush Campaign

There are time, too, when the teacher introduces special themes or proposals for children to consider. As an illustration, with . . . National Book Week pending, Mrs. Frisk called attention to it and asked for suggestions about what might be done and prepared to add other suggestions not given. Among the group's proposals were these:

- A committee might interview the principal about how to get the whole school involved.

-A committee might interview the bookstore owner or librarian to see about a special program which might be set up.

-Individuals or committees might develop bulletin boards to "advertise" favorite books and authors through 3-dimensional art sculpture or cut-out character portraits or scenes.

-Individuals might care to make "Picture Book Lists" of their own favorite books or book characters or authors.

-Individuals might wish to develop posters to be displayed, with permission, in various community shops.

-Individuals might care to prepare an original book, perhaps about the process of book-making. (These children might want to see the film: *The Art of Children's Picture Book Making* for ideas.)

Suggestions like these of course are endless, depending upon the interests of the children and the teacher's vision in eliciting a range of alternatives. In any case who does what is usually determined in the planning periods, with various individuals signing up for different responsibilities.

Even with group projects like the one described, individual children may prefer not to participate, but to develop or continue their own activities. One child in the midst of developing a morpheme-structure wishes to continue it. Another decides to listen to a Grimm Brothers' folk tale record, perhaps with the idea of adapting it for a puppet show. Several children prefer to practice their spelling and handwriting. Whatever the choice, the responsibility for results usually leads to some sort of public sharing, whether with a small or large group, another child or with the teacher. In this way the base of choice-making is ever broadened and the commitment to share with others is maintained.

*Fourth, the teacher encourages continuous interaction among children.* Not only are children generally responsible for choosing what to do and how, but with whom to work. Sometimes project choices are made originally in terms of small groups or committees. Sometimes children choose to work with a partner—or alone.

Ever so many occasions arise for all sorts of informal, unplanned conversations among children as they work near each other. Talking over results, sharing personal experiences, providing one another with feed-back information, making suggestions, exchanging ideas, showing one another how to do something—all of these encounters encourage children to value each other as persons with strengths and limitations.

Self-limitations, too, are recognized in give-and-take situations, as when Mary wrote to her teacher<sup>12</sup>:

Cristy is having a lot av problems with her Reading and i cannot  
hlep her it is a lot av trouble for me to hlep her from Mary to  
Miss Fear

In this way not only are the number of teachers in the classroom multiplied, but the adult teacher can relax sufficiently to function as an authentic person, too, with his own strengths and limitations. Little Bert must have recognized this in choosing to write a letter to his teacher:

Dear Miss Fear:

I miss you even if I get to see you still I think you are a great  
teacher

(signed)

Bert Schuman

*Fifth, the teacher continually plans for depth experiences.* While children are pursuing their various goals, the teacher conducts individual conferences and small group sessions, initiated either by the teacher or by children who request help and express certain interests.

During conferences individuals may read to the teacher, discuss a story read, share an original story, ask for help in evaluating it or receive special assistance with one kind of problem or another.

During small group sessions a variety of skills and understandings are given direct attention. A small group may be assembled to build synonyms or antonyms, to discuss the use of imagery in storywriting and storytelling. Certain individuals may be helped to practice the use of context clues or consonant blends in decoding words.

One teacher called together those children who had been reading folk tales in an effort to heighten awareness of the basic structure of folk tales as expression of universal plot motifs<sup>13</sup>. She did so with these six and seven year olds, because she had noticed their interest in reading folk tales. Actually the folk-tale seminar lasted for several meetings.

Whatever the nature of the session, this is a time for intensive pursuit of needs and interests usually emerging from the ongoing activities. Of course, the teacher also stimulates new interests which may not be related to ongoing activities. This is done by daily reading of stories to children and frequent introductions to new experiences with language and literature, such as choral speaking, limerick writing,

kernel-sentence building, or whatever. While these may be started with an entire group and continued with an interest group, they may also be brought up in planning periods with an announcement of special seminars to be held that day or the next. Children also have the privilege of calling groups together or arranging for conferences with other children. One child may ask another to read with him or announce to the class a special art session on how to draw figures, make masks and puppets—with himself as “teacher”.

What obviously matters here is not the sequencing of skills in terms of arbitrary presentations to all children, but skill growth in the context of rich language arts experiences. What matters is not the scope of skills to be covered over the year, but language powers to be uncovered in application, analysis and synthesis of the higher cognitive processes. Evaluation is used to note satisfactions and dissatisfactions with achievement and progress being made. It serves as a tool for examining the goals selected, in terms of results obtained, and for developing new goals.

#### *A Final Word*

All in all, the open structured school environment is designed to effect a dynamic interaction among people with language as the mode for relating. Although moving in the same general direction of increased language facility, each child yet can respond with his own rhythm, with his own uniqueness as a language producer-maker and a language consumer-user.

Instead of the teacher's single-handedly or by virtue of “outside authority” attempting to control the classroom structure—what is done and who does it, where, when and why—the structure opens up so that everyone involved has the obligation to participate in the decisions to be made. The structure opens up to let the child in and allow language to function as an extension of self.

#### Notes and References

1. The writer recently conducted an interview study of 1500 children on their views of school life, especially their views of the concept of cooperation (unpublished). Published studies include those of Philip Jackson reported in *Life in Classrooms*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968); and Marie Hughes, *The Assessment of the Quality of Teaching: A Research Report* (U.S. Office of Education Cooperative Research Project No. 353, 1959).
2. Irving Hallowell makes a strong case for communication which rises above the level of “primitive” language in “Self, Society and Culture in Phylogenetic Perspective” in *Culture: Man's Adaptive Dimension*, (Edited by Ashley Montagu, New York: Oxford University Press, 1968, pp. 206-213). Also developing the premise of language functions is Walter Loban in “What Language Reveals,” in *Language and Meaning*, (Edited by James MacDonald, Washington: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1966, pp. 66-73).

3. Jack Frymier analyzes the need for educational change in his new book, *Fostering Educational Change*. (Columbus: Charles Merrill, 1969). Also interesting is a letter written to the *Los Angeles Times* by Paul Davis in which he reports an interview with the Director of the Pedagogical Institute who said: "In America if Johnnie doesn't learn, you say 'dumb Johnnie' or 'foolish Johnnie'. If Ivan doesn't learn, we say to the teacher... 'What are you doing wrong?'" (*Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1969).
4. See some recent explorations into analyses of curriculum, such as Louise Berman, *New Priorities for Curriculum*. (Columbus: Charles Merrill, 1969); James Miller, "Imagination and the Literature Curriculum," in *New Directions in Elementary English*. (Edited by Alexander Frazier. Champaign: National Council of Teachers of English, 1967, pp. 15-33); and *Life Skills in School and Society*. (Edited by Louis Rubin. Washington, ASCD, 1969).
5. The value of conversation in human life is explored by Dwayne Huebner in "New Modes of Man's Relationship to Man," in *New Insights and the Curriculum*. (Edited by Alexander Frazier. Washington, ASCD, 1963, pp. 144-164). The implications of various researches are summarized in Edna Ambrose and Alice Miel *Children's Social Learning*. (Washington: ASCD, 1958).
6. The need for honest communication is explored by Eugene Gendlin, "The Discovery of Felt Meaning," in *Language and Meaning*. (op. cit., pp. 45-62).
7. For study of relationship of ends and means, see Darrow, "Reality, Morality and Individualized Reading" in *Claremont Reading Conference Yearbook* 1968. (Edited by Malcolm Douglass. Claremont University Center, 1968).
8. Some of the schools in Great Britain are stressing the base of experiencing, as reported in John Dixon's *Growth through English*. (Reading, England: National Association for the Teaching of English, 1966). See also John Dewey, *Experience and Education*. (New York: Macmillan, 1938).
9. For stimulating reading of excerpts of Existentialistic thought see Maxine Greene, *Existential Encounters for Teachers*. (New York: Random House, 1967).
10. For further discussion of the meaning and implications of open structure, see *Exploring Open Structure* by Virgil Howes, Helen Darrow et al. (Los Angeles: Educational Inquiry, 1968). There are other suggestions for planning and organizing open structure to be found in Darrow and Howes, *Approaches to Individualized Reading*. (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1960); and Darrow and Allen, *Independent Activities for Creative Learning*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1963). Also see the very recent book by Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn*. (Columbus: Charles Merrill, 1969).
11. Miss Barbara Saunders teaches at Oak Street School, Inglewood, California.
12. Miss Darlene Fear teaches at Arroyo School, Fountain Valley, California.

*This paper by Dr. Hymes is an edited version taken from the tapescript of his oral presentation. An attempt has been made to retain much of the conversation-type presentation. - Ed.*

## MAKING THE BEGINNING OF READING A SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCE

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In a sense, we are meeting here as two people, neighbors across the hall, who are to be the closest friends and the most intimate neighbors and the best of acquaintances, because people who have a love for reading, a specialization in reading and a particular interest in reading and people who think of themselves as friends of young children ought to be people who have a tremendous amount in common. So it's a little bit as if you knock on the door next door and find out that there's somebody there who shares something that is quite precious to you that we ought to be assembled here this morning on this occasion. One reason for such a combined group is that reading in the young child's experience is so obviously the source of something which matters desperately to the young child. It's a great source of power, a source of mastering, a source of control, a means of bringing into the youngster one of life's really great "goodies." That is the sense of knowing more and being more informed and more able and more confident. One of the very strongest drives in the young child is this search to grow and this search to be big—the search to do more—a search that shows up repeatedly in children's play.

I would emphasize to you the tremendous significance of play in the young child's life—play serving no end of intellectual, social, physical, and maybe very specially, emotional services in the young child's development. If you're young you have to play, just as later you have to work or hold a job or have friends or travel or read a book or meet a challenge. Each age has its distinctive jobs and ways of functioning. Play has to find a legitimacy in the young child's life.

As you listen to young children playing, one of the persistent, dominant notes is that there's a sense of importance. "I must be the pilot." "I must be the captain." "I must be the collector of tickets." "I must be the doctor." "I must be the mommy." "I must be the daddy." The sounds of youngsters choosing roles over and over in the expression of this tremendously strong urge inside of them to grow.

You see infants crawling and then pulling themselves up and

standing alone and then taking their first steps. You see youngsters working so hard to build their coordination. You see them wanting to feed themselves and dress themselves. I will never forget one of our student teachers at Maryland who was walking one of our youngsters to the bathroom, which unfortunately was down the hall a piece. The young student teacher was feeling so useful. And they got to the door of the bathroom and then the youngster turned and said, "You go away. I'll do it by myself." And this, in a sense, is the theme song of a large part of early childhood. "I'll do it by myself." So, anything that helps youngsters feel more able, more strong, more knowledgeable, more managing, more in control, and less at the mercy of what's going on, is one of the really nice things for a child as he's growing up.

There are many experiences that are valuable to young children. Of all the really great experiences of the whole range of early childhood, the things that I suspect really entrance young children the most are stories and books. Books can be the young kid's best friend, whether it is at home with a parent or at his school with a teacher, the young child is saying, "Read it again, read it again." Children love to have stories read to them, over and over again.

One of those things I think we strive for at all levels of education is to have the motor power and the steam and the energy coming from the kids rather than from the teacher, the adult, the bigger person controlling and managing. To do this, I have tried always to say in the many different parts of the school program, beware of the group. What you want to do is bring a group together—nursery school, kindergarten, Head Start, day care, first grade—but once you get them together the first thing you want to do is separate them so that you have not one group but eight groups, nine groups, ten groups, small groups which you and I would call in our adult behavior buzz sessions. But I have to say that in nursery, kindergarten, Head Start, the one time of the day when you stand the best chance of bringing a whole group together *profitably* is story time. Very little else that any teacher can do, no matter how dramatic she wants to be, has the lure or the appeal of one fabulous story after another.

I am reminded, as I think of this love match that ought to exist between people in the field of reading and books and people who say they are friends to young children, of the kind of thing that happens in the University of Maryland graduation, which has become a nationwide phenomenon. When the graduates of the school of nursing stand up and are awarded their degrees and are still standing, the graduates of the college of medicine stand up and then they turn and they doff their hats to the new nurses and the nurses in turn blow kisses to the doctors. I don't know where it goes from there, but they are saying, in a sense, "We go together, we're meant for each other, we're pals, we're friends."

I think that is the situation potentially with the start of reading and young children. It ought to be the happiest of times, but you know I feel that it often is not so. The way in which reading is begun, the way in which it's done, the way in which it's approached, so often spoils reading for children. There are at this moment in early childhood, as in reading, as in perhaps every other field, many people, and I would include myself among them, who are just desperately concerned about the harm being done to reading and the harm being done to children.

I get very concerned about any form of education at any age, that is basically adult-dominated. I am frightened to death of the dictatorship of love or the dictatorship of force, or the control by the big people. You can do almost anything with love or force with little kids. However, as soon as you leave early childhood, people start talking back, and the swing is never a revolt from dictatorship to democracy but always from dictatorship to anarchy. I'm troubled when I think we may be feeding into the fires of hostility, the fires of irrational resentment and resistance. Perhaps I feel this way because I think it's been one of our lifelong battles in education to establish what might be thought of as the proper flow with the questions coming from the kids instead of the questions coming from the adults.

Suppose you had four-year-old groups that are as dominated as our five-year-old groups are today. Wouldn't it be ghastly if the extension of education downward meant catching kids in this terrible trap of giving up their souls and their integrity because now we build schools for them?

It concerns me a great deal what we apparently are trying to do to many four-year-olds in these days of Early Childhood programs. We seem to be making kindergarten like first grade, and then teaching four-year-olds like fives and then threes like fours. There seems to be that danger of looking at early childhood, not from the standpoint of what it can do for kids, but what it can do for making our lives easier as kids come into our schools.

One of the most unacceptable reasons for public education for four-year-olds is that we can work on reading readiness. We can get into that most ridiculous cycle of providing fourth year to get children ready for fifth year to get ready for sixth year, etc. The whole thing becomes just a kind of readiness drill, but this idea is becoming very, very hard to sell.

Public education for four-year-olds is ages overdue, and the greatest justification there is for it is that it will help four-year-olds live better. The purpose of public education for four-year-olds is to give them experiences that children deserve, not as pre-first graders, but as children, as humans.

One of the justifications for Head Start programs has been that you can see a difference by the time children get to first grade. But the more important question is "Can we see a difference when they're four?" We tend to be so concerned about the future for these children that everything we do is geared toward what will happen in first grade. But the question should not be whether we should provide readiness training or postpone it. Instead we should be focusing on how we go about it. Isn't there some way of introducing reading and learning so that it becomes a good friend of the child, so that it becomes a source of power, so that it becomes a source of pleasure, so that the flow is right from teacher to child, instead of the teacher asking, pushing, reminding, checking?

I hesitate to tell you such an old, old story, but it always seems so relevant—the tale of the three Boy Scouts who came to the scout meeting not having done their good turn. And the scout master sent them out, telling them to go do their good turn, and then come back. And in a very short time the three of them came back and the scout master said, "Now Johnny, what was your good turn?" He said, "I helped an old lady across the street." And the scout master said, "That's fine. Billy, what did you do?" "I helped Johnny help the old lady across the street." The scout master said, "Well, that's all right, but was beginning to be a little suspicious when he said, "Jimmy, what did you do?" He said, "Well, please Sir, I helped Billy help Johnny help the old lady across the street." And the scout master said, "Something strange here. Why should it take three Boy Scouts to help one little old lady across the street?" "Well, please Sir, she didn't want to cross the street." I have a feeling that in early childhood we may be working much too hard. We may be spending far too much money. We may be making much too much of a production because we haven't quite found the little old lady who wants to cross the street.

I am trying to say that there are just many, many things that I think most children will love, and choose, and select, and go for, and eat up, and be delighted with. I heard the other day of a kindergarten that had to give up its storytime because it had so much work to do. Let me say, in all of early childhood, the more storytimes the better. The teacher can read stories and volunteers can read stories, so that kids have a chance to hear one story after another. Young children love stories. And the good school has lots of people around who can help with this—parents, sixth graders, fifth graders, etc. I have been suggesting that this is a superb job for principals who are looking for a chance to find out what's going on in the school.

Obviously this requires a kind of classroom where children can move around, where there is both time and opportunity for individual children to look at books as often and as long as they want. This also requires that books go home and that parents read books with their

children, because we know that early childhood education, like all levels of education, is totally insignificant if it operates alone. It's the school *and* the home that educate.

Books are available through lending libraries and sales of inexpensive books and swapping of books so that people can get them, one way or another. Have the room filled with books and provide a chance to deal in books. The youngsters will love it! It will be fabulous for them! Fabulous, I think, for reading.

Another important resource that I think is even harder to obtain than large numbers of books and storytimes is large numbers of what I call "gutsy" pictures. I say "gutsy" because almost every picture that's been printed for your kids is so namby-pamby that it ought to be given to a two-year-old who has hardly lived anything or been anywhere. What you want is a tremendous array of pictures so that any three-, four-, or five-year-old who is alive today will come into the room and say, "Hey, look at that!"

I think you can say that the youngsters are tremendously interested in getting ideas and stimulation and information and trains of thought from what comes out of this form of reading. Children love, on their own, to look at pictures. But these aren't the kind of pictures you can buy. They just aren't available commercially. They are the kind of pictures that teachers often can find or make or create or draw or get somebody else to draw. However you get them, reach for pictures that grab. Also, the pictures I'm talking about are not a center of a group discussion, not the teacher holding the picture, saying, "Now, you look at it and you show me where . . ." I'm talking about pictures where you count on the lure of the picture, not the strength of an adult, to make the kid say, "Hey, look." These things I think of as imperative in early childhood. You have to tell me whether they're imperative in reading.

Another essential ingredient in early childhood programs is field trips. Children can take trips so they don't stay ignorant. They can come to school knowing more because they've been more places. It's amazing that a culture that thinks nothing of traveling all over the whole wide world is finding it impossible to let its five-year-olds get out of their classrooms. Kids are living on this very thin stream of vicarious impressions from TV and adult talk. I've been telling over and over the story that impressed me so of a kindergarten group that did what I think is increasingly in evidence today. The mothers provided the cars and drove the kids to the little local airport, which is smaller than the Bellingham Airport. They made arrangements ahead so that the youngsters could get into one of the small planes with the pilot. He was there talking to them, and setting them in the seats, letting them get really a sense of what a plane is, and then the plane owner and his wife, both pilots, whispered for a second and then they said to the teachers

and to the parents, "Wouldn't the kids like to go up in the plane?" These parents were saying that planes are not things that sit on a runway, they're things that go up in the air. This kindergarten class in groups of fours and fives went up in the plane.

If kids are really going to learn to read, they have to know the reality for which words are the symbols. If you want kids really to have a deep concern for using these symbols to give them more and more knowledge, they have to start with a tremendously satisfying, pleasing body of solid information. Seeing, being there, using, touching, smelling, climbing on, being a part of—these are the things that count in children's learning. The beginning of reading should not distort the child's living or a teacher-child relationship. It should be part of the total program that should be based on stories, pictures, trips. The trips and experiences lead naturally to talking about the experiences. And I think of a close, intimate bond between talking and reading. Young children need a chance to talk and something to talk about. And I don't mean teacher, I mean kids, humans, talking freely, easily, so that the sound of an early childhood group is the buzz of fascinated humans full of stuff to say. And I would say, this is a part of the beginning of reading.

Let's go back to my image of the trip. The things that are important are the letters asking if we can go and when, the notices we've made and sent—notice to the principal, notices posted on the door, notices to parents. We are trying to surround children in the classroom the way you and I are surrounded in this world outside, with signs and notices, and information and warnings, so they know we're living in a society that is dependent on these symbols.

When the kids come back, the teacher's willingness to make the signs that are appropriate and useful for the play that develops is crucial, signs such as "Ticket Office," "Baggage," "Taxi," "Bellingham Airport," "Avis." The stories that come out of what the kids have been doing are essential. These are stories sometimes just spoken, as a teacher or an aide listens because the kids are communicating about something important that has happened. Some of these stories are written down on tagboard charts. And some of them are more permanently preserved so that a class has at the end of the year maybe 200 of its own books based on what its own kids have been doing, were full of and wanting to write down.

We need to be surrounding kids with so many elements of a literate society. We need teachers who know every sum of the elements, the tricks, the skills of reading, left-to-right progression, the starts of words and the ends of words and the idea of getting "stuff" through context.

Like the story, like the trips, like the tools, the teacher takes a very active part. The teacher is circulating, moving, listening to what kids are saying, occasionally stopping, becoming an active participant in conversations. She is sometimes raising a question, sometimes volunteering a fact.

Let me just try and make clear now what I haven't been saying. I didn't say workbooks. If you want to do something very useful with money, give it to teachers for petty cash, not to be spent on workbooks. They can spend it measurably more wisely.

I didn't say a few books for young children. I said hundreds upon hundreds of excellent books by bona fide authors and bona fide artists, including the kids. I didn't say to bring them together for a specific reading time, when everyone's got to sit down and all have to be in a group or all have to be in three groups. An early childhood program is a program of trips, of play, of activity, of materials. It's a program for young kids in which somebody is very aware of reading, the way you hope teachers are very aware of math, of science, of teaching ethics, of psychology, very aware of all the teaching opportunities as kids do important things as three-, or four-, or five-year-olds.

This becomes a highly individualized program. I've been trying to convey the notion that every kid gets all the help he needs and no kid gets help forced on him to make him cross the street that he doesn't give a darn about. It's a program of choice, great choice. The program uses pictures and books and trips and all kinds of things. It's a program of integration in which people know that in this day and age you can't teach reading as a separate, isolated, pulled apart, 20-minutes-a-day kind of thing, because there's too much to know. So what you look for are the richer loads, the richer experiences, so that any one thing becomes reading or math or science or art or the thing that to me is increasingly important—understanding of human relations. This is the three-year-old, four-year-old, five-year-old course in psychology. This is the three-, four-, five-year-old course in ethics and in values. It's reading integrated into all the other learnings that matter to a child.

We have got to consider what this little kid is like when we bring him to school. He is a very active, busy, real-life-centered, strongly individual, full-of-his-own-ideas, constantly moving, kind of youngster. He's not a sitting, listening, waiting, happily-doing-what-other-people-want-him-to-do kind of child. And that simply must influence the way we try to teach him and the way we try to teach him reading.

In closing, I have to talk about the parents. Parents are concerned about the education of their children, and rightly so. And unfortu-

nately it's a rare school district that is investing even a small percentage of the time, energy and skill that ought to go into helping parents know what is involved in the teaching of reading as well as in other areas.

One thing I keep saying to teachers of young children is that no matter what it costs you in terms of time and effort, you have to meet with your parents just as often as you possibly can. And I would say at the bare minimum that every group of parents of young children ought to meet at least once early in the school year with the teacher, no one else. This would be ideally in the classroom with the stuff right around so that the teacher has the chance to say, "This is what I'm like and this is what I do and this is why I do it, and these are all the ways in which reading and other things will be taught." Whether it is a single meeting or it is followed by one the next week depends, I think, on the unresolved questions or antagonism or lack of clarity that emerges. One thing I know. It can never be done on a once-a-month PTA all school meeting basis.

A second thing I keep urging teachers of young children to do is to write as many newsletters to parents as they can possibly bring themselves to write. I think this depends a little bit on whether or not you type. I think it depends a little bit on what happened to you when you were being taught writing, because, you know, we used to work so darned hard on reading, that we crippled a lot of people or persuaded them that they just couldn't write a line. I write to my three kids and to my mother every week and it's just sort of routine. I sit down and bang it out, and it's simple because all I'm saying is "This is what we've done this week." I think this is what parents need to hear from the teacher. "This is what we've done this week." And if it is to a group of parents who I know to be concerned about reading, I want to be awfully sure that in that paper or news report there's a fair share given to the ideas, the words, the skills, the sounds, the events, whatever it was, that was a part of our particular day. I think we're keeping parents in the dark and then we get surprised when in these tense and anxious times they strike out at us.

I'll tell you a third thing that seems to me just as imperative. I think we have to have as many parents as we possibly can in our classrooms, because you can't do it completely in an evening meeting and you can't do it completely through the best kinds of letters, but there's a better chance of doing it if these two, then, are supplemented by parents seeing with their own eyes. Of course, the presence of these parents in the room can serve a double purpose. Besides keeping them informed about what is going on, we can have them *become part of* what's going on. They can become the readers of stories whenever they come. They can learn to talk with children, to listen to children, to write down the ideas children want recorded. They can become a part

of this program, and they can work hand in hand with the school, helping to provide the meaningful experiences they want for their children, helping to make learning enjoyable, helping to make the beginning of reading a significant experience.

## CHILDREN'S VIEWS OF LANGUAGE

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### *The Language/Thought Paradox*

The two most important scientific investigations of children's thought and language have been without doubt those made respectively by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Their conclusions are essentially complementary and support each other although the former conducted his research on children in Geneva while the latter's subjects were Russian boys and girls. In a previous article I have reviewed American and British research on children's thinking which leads also to essentially the same conclusions.<sup>1</sup> All these findings present the teacher with a paradoxical problem of great importance in the teaching of language skills.

Piaget's<sup>6</sup> finding in his original study was:

Verbal forms always evolve more slowly than actual understanding.

In other words, the natural learning process of child development is for the child to understand an idea first before he can describe it in language. Recently, with the assistance of his colleague Barbel Inhelder, Piaget<sup>7</sup> has reviewed and summed up the whole of his life-time of research on child psychology, and in this latest book he makes the following important statement:

Language does not constitute the source of logic but is, on the contrary, structured by it.

For example, in learning to read, when a child has understood the logic of how vowel letter pairs usually operate in English spelling, he might then be able to express his discovery verbally as follows: "when two vowel letters come next to each other usually it's the first one that tells you what the sound is."

But, all too often the formal teaching of synthetic phonics attempts to reverse nature by making children learn by rote such verbal formulae as: "When two vowels go walking together, the first one does the talking", before they have understood the basic logic.

Vygotsky's<sup>8</sup> observations of children's thought and language led him to warn teachers about the futility of such reversals of the natural process:

Direct teaching of concepts is impossible and fruitless. A teacher who tries to do this usually accomplishes nothing but empty verbalism, a parrot-like repetition of words by the child, simulating a knowledge of the corresponding concepts but actually covering up a vacuum.

Thus what teachers believe they are teaching and what their children actually are learning may be two very different things. This lack of communication is bound to exist in schools where teachers ignore the child's natural way of learning concepts and the language related to them. But let us assume that all of us here today wish to avoid this wasteful pedagogical error. If so, we need to inquire how it is possible to make a child-centered approach to the learning of language skills when teaching through language is fraught with the danger of merely "covering up a vacuum." Are we to teach language without language?

Of course not. Vygotsky condemns not all teaching through language, but only those language formulae for concepts which children have not yet understood. However, this does not entirely resolve the problem. Suppose the concept is to do with language itself. Suppose the child does not yet understand this concept about language. How can the teacher help the child to develop the language concept without using language?

All this may sound terribly confusing to you, but it is much worse for the child trying to sort out the problem when the teacher has not sorted it out in his own mind.

The vital distinction we must make is between two possible ways of presenting information about language to children:

(1) We can give children experiences of *language-about-language*.

or

(2) We can give them experiences of *language itself*.

"When two vowels go walking . . ." is language-about-language which results in worse than the vacuum described by Vygotsky. As I have shown in another article<sup>2</sup> this language-about-language approach is the type of experience which causes children to learn that reading and writing are meaningless rituals to be performed only to please adults.

#### *Language Experience and the Development of Children's Concepts of Language*

If children are to understand the nature of language and the logic

of its relationship to the written form, experiences with teachers' language-about-language are worse than useless. For this purpose we need to give children instead genuine real-life experiences of language itself, for as Piaget has demonstrated in connection with the child's development of thought in respect to mathematics, for instance, understanding of the concepts involved depends on his actions with concrete examples. Learning to read and write, with its attendant understanding of the several linguistic concepts involved, is just as much a problem-solving task as mathematical learning. But, strangely, educators seldom seem to recognize that learning to read constitutes a set of problems to be solved by the child, although they readily admit this is the case in the child's learning of mathematics. Perhaps literacy seems to adults to be merely a simple extension of oral language, whereas numeracy appears to be a special subject separate from previous experience in action or language.

Actually, for the school beginner both literacy and numeracy are equally related to his previous experience in action and in language. There are many logical similarities between the learning of literacy and learning mathematics. For example, both involve codes. Moreover in both cases a *double* code is involved. In math we use words like "one", "two", "half", "twice", etc., which themselves constitute an abstract code for more concrete entities. This is the primary code. Then the child must relate this to a secondary written code with symbols such as "1", "2", " $1/2$ ", " $2x$ ", etc. Recognition of such steps has revolutionised math teaching in recent years by giving priority to children's conceptual learning instead of the rote learning of verbal formulae — whether spoken or written.

But the same principle applies with at least equal strength in learning to read and write. All our spoken language is a primary code for representing concepts abstracted from the experience of reality. Written language is a secondary code of visual symbols for the primary code of speech. Therefore, the priority in this field, too, must be given to children's learning of the concepts of literacy instead of the rote learning of spoken or written verbal formulae.

#### *What is "decoding"?*

This is the grave error of those approaches to reading instruction which have been mis-named "code oriented" methods. They attempt to teach children to decode before they understand the concept of a code and the other concepts involved in the decoding and encoding processes.

My research over the past three years<sup>4</sup> has uncovered clear evidence that normal beginners do not understand the basic concept of written

symbolization either in the special area of math or in language in general. They have no notion of a code in which one thing can represent something else. Therefore, the child has a much more difficult task than simply learning to decode writing to speech or to encode speech into written symbols. He must solve the problem of *what is a code* and what are all these aspects of the code which the adults talk about as if they were self-evident, e.g. "word", "sound", "letter", "number", "reading", "writing".

Faced with the problem of relating adult talk to the samples of written language, the young child tries to guess what people mean by these terms. He develops hunches and tries them out to see if they work. By a series of intellectual trial and error attempts and with appropriate experiential feedback he arrives closer and closer to the generally accepted concept.<sup>5</sup>

These research studies have led me to propose a "cognitive clarity theory of reading" which postulates that

the learning-to-read process [consists of] a series of solutions to the sub-problems which constitute the total complex problem of finding out how to read . . . . As the child's attempted solutions approximate more and more closely to the reality of each aspect of the reading process, so he will achieve more and more *cognitive clarity*. The best measure of a child's progress in solving the learning-to-read problem, therefore, should be his degree of understanding of the nature of the task. Thus cognitive clarity will be correlated most highly with reading success, while failure in reading will have as its chief symptom *cognitive confusion*<sup>3</sup>.

#### *Developing Cognitive Clarity*

As we have seen above, giving children verbal formulae at best does no more than conceal a vacuum in the child's understanding, because this usually amounts to nothing more than language-about-language. What the child needs to help him solve these problems is numerous concrete examples of the concepts to be learned. For this purpose, the language experience approach is the most valuable technique available to reading teachers.

The first and most important language concept the child must develop is that of the *purposes* of the written form of language. As Vygotsky's research showed, the young beginner starts with "only a vague idea of its usefulness." The various methods encompassed by the language experience approach all provide children with concrete demonstrations of the communicative and expressive purposes of written language. Probably, the most important of all are his own experiences as an author. Through these he can perceive clearly why an

author writes and why a reader reads. When a reader or a writer shares his activity with a beginner, this is another excellent source of experiences demonstrating the purposes of literacy.

Similarly, the language experience approach provides the best opportunities for developing specific concepts of literacy, e.g. "sentence", "word", "writing", etc. If the teacher is aware of the child's problems in developing these concepts, he will be careful to use such terms clearly and consistently in his incidental conversations accompanying the writing activities of the language-experience approach. For example, such a teacher will take care to see that the spaces between the words on the written charts clearly mark the boundaries between word units, and when he writes he can talk about "this word" and "now the next word", etc., as he writes them. This will seem quite natural to the child of this age who is still at the egocentric stage in which such "collective monologues" (cf. Piaget) are a normal accompaniment to actions such as writing.

There should also be activities with the spoken language *alone* which will help children to develop these linguistic concepts. Children should understand such concepts as "spoken word" and "phoneme", for example, before they learn how to code them in writing. It is of little value for a child to learn the written code symbol for something which doesn't really exist in his own mind. Indeed, it will hamper the child's development of the concept of a code if the code symbols taught represent nothing in his view of reality. This is the case where formal phonics teachers say, for instance, that "the letters *ta* say 'ta'" and the child has no concept of (1) a phoneme, (2) the particular phonemes /t/ and /a/, or (3) the letters.

#### *Extension of this Principle*

In this paper I have focused chiefly on the conceptual problems of the very young beginner, but obviously the principle of beginning from the child's own level of development in language and thought must be extended to all other aspects of language teaching: vocabulary, grammar, etc., - all should be based on this same principle.

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This article is an edited version of Dr. McCracken's speech. An attempt has been made to retain much of the flavor of his oral presentation.—Ed.

WRITE TO READ  
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What I say this morning is a joint effort. My wife, Marlene, and I as you must know by now, have had the good fortune of having Leswing Press publish a book called *Reading Is Only The Tiger's Tail* (RIOTT). It is truly a combined effort. I want to talk about a lot of the things in that book. RIOTT contains the nitty gritty about how to get children to write. I'm not going to describe that. But, I want to talk about how children write, what they write, and about inspiring them to write.

I had a most delightful treat twenty years ago. Frederic Meicher,

who has frequently been given the title of the Father of Children's Books in the United States, was attending a Christmas party that I just happened to attend. Someone said, "Will you recite *The King's Breakfast*?" He did. The house had a banister running down a staircase into the living room, and Frederic Melcher recited and acted the whole poem. When he came down the banister with his gray hair flying, he rekindled an interest in Milne that I'd had as a child. Yesterday, Sam Sebesta rekindled that flame again when he recited A. A. Milne's *Disobedience*. "James James Morrison Morrison Weatherby George Dupris . . ."

Frederic Melcher is now dead. His son, Daniel, continues with his father's work in the world of books. In the *School Library Journal* for October, 1969, Daniel Melcher wrote a most delightful article entitled "Architectonics of the Mind." Daniel Melcher comments about a foreboding that many people have about the continued existence of books. "Ours (books) is a product which has already changed the world, but whose greatest triumphs are still to come. In the gallery of great inventions, the book is second only to speech. By contrast most of its competitors rank alongside the electric carving knife (p. 108)." The book is not dead. It really hasn't been challenged. The book is man's storehouse of ideas. Norman Cousins has recently resigned as the editor of *Saturday Review* and embarked on a new magazine called *World*. Norman Cousins, who to me is one of the genuine human beings of the world, has this to say about books and writing in his third *World* editorial. "As we embark on a new magazine, we know we will have to live with various uncertainties-uncertainties that are implicit in a profession that has had more than its share of casualties in recent years. But of one thing we are certain. Print and thought go together. So long as people value thought, there will be a central place for the written word. We intend to succeed; if we don't, it will not be because we used the wrong medium because we didn't have the right message."<sup>1</sup> Those people who are gloom and doomist, claiming that books are obsolete or obsolescent, that books and writing are going out, either don't value thought, or they don't have any thoughts.

If teachers want children to write, teachers must value children's thoughts. You convince children that their thoughts are valuable, which they are; you merely pose a problem to the children saying, "Boys and girls, you have such wonderful ideas, but once you say them they're gone. There is a way to save your thoughts. It's writing." When children realize that you're interested in saving their wonderful thoughts, they write. One of the simplest techniques that we've seen is a good looking, bound book with blank pages entitled *Our Wonderful Thoughts*. Every child who has a wonderful thought, wonderful enough to be saved, is allowed to write it in *Our Wonderful Thoughts*. As children record ideas daily, they sense which thoughts are ephemeral for the day, and which ones are worth keeping for the year and perhaps an eternity.

Figure 1

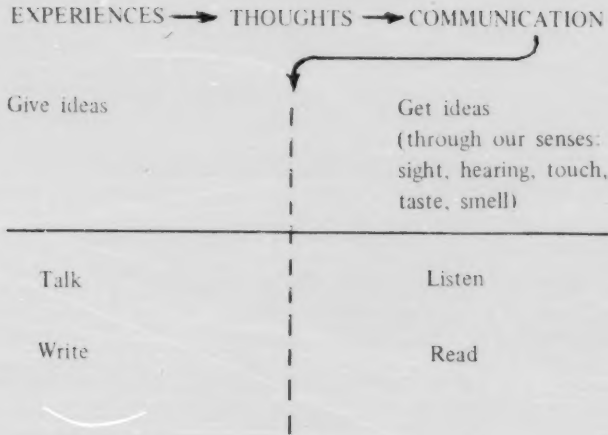


Figure 1, in slightly different form, is in RIOTT. I want to emphasize the writing aspect and how we get kids into writing. Children live and they have experiences. Children learn to think as they respond to their experiences through their senses. If we want kids to think, we must get them using all five senses. We must get them responding through all of their senses to things that occur. How does red look? Yes, but also, how might red taste, feel, smell or sound? How does a rainy day feel? Wet, of course. But how does it look, how does it taste, and how does a rainy day sound? Realize that children can respond with all senses, even though the conventional way is through a single sense. When children begin to think about how a color feels, how it tastes, how it might sound, and how it smells, something happens to their work in art: their work becomes creative. Color becomes more than something to see. Color sends messages; color says something. As children have experiences, they can talk about them. To talk is the child's role; the teacher's role is to listen, to modify and comment, but to listen and to get the child to write. The word "write" in Figure 1 initially means "to record," not necessarily the writing of words. A child gets his thoughts recorded in some fashion. The simplest fashion is a picture. The ideas and the thoughts come first. The pictures and the illustrations come second. The actual writing of words comes third. If you have kids write and then illustrate, frequently the illustrations are sterile and meaningless. But if you get the expression in art form first there may be something worth writing about. The teacher watches and says, "What is that?" to a child who is drawing a picture that is difficult to understand. The child says, "A stream," and then the teacher asks,

"How do you think that stream might taste if you could get down on your hands and knees and put your face in that stream?" Suddenly the stream gets more color, or the stream gets bigger. The teacher says, "What might swim in that stream?" and a fish or frog appears. Thoughts are developed orally based upon what initially is in the picture. The picture becomes more complex, the demand for language becomes greater, and eventually encoded words are needed to describe the picture. The reading (word recognition) takes care of itself. When I talk about reading usually I'm talking about responding to the content of books, bringing the content right into one's own life and using it meaningfully. But today I'm talking about reading as word recognition.

The first step in teaching a child to read is a very simple one. It is in no reading readiness book that I know of, in no reading series that I know of, and in no program that I know of as the readiness activity; it's the activity that I call getting kids to love books and to love language. Bill Martin's *Sounds of Language Program* comes the closest. Sam Sebastia did it for two days here. He did a dozen things, but he kept saying love books, love language, even though he never used those exact words. He did it by demonstrating his own love of books. I want to demonstrate a little bit of mine.

I sometimes have termed this the lap technique, meaning get the child on your lap. After all what is a lap for? Every teacher has one of the best teaching tools in the world right in front of him every time he sits down; yet most teachers never use it in the classroom. Marlene and I spent six weeks this summer on the Quinault Indian Reservation, teaching Quinault children in their summer camp. We used our laps. We just didn't have enough, so we sat on the floor. We got mauled slightly while we read orally to the children. The children just wanted to be close, to be touched and to feel some of the teacher's happiness as the teacher read a book that he loved. Books that a teacher loves will become loved by the children and the language of those books will be loved.

You might know A. A. Milne's

Christopher Robin goes  
Hoppity hoppity hoppity hop.

(You'll never have any trouble with how many *hoppities* because it fits.)

If he stopped hopping he couldn't go anywhere  
Poor little Christopher couldn't go anywhere  
That's why he always goes  
Hoppity hoppity hoppity hop.

If you read that to children, they'll say it and hop all over the place. When we say we dislike repetition, we are saying we dislike senseless repetition. "Hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hop" is not senseless. If you want the kids to line up to go someplace, you just line up and go hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hop until you get there. It's very simple. You teach each child to understand and respond to books. I'm being very serious by saying you hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hoppity hop to somewhere because when children hop somewhere they are responding to a book, not just listening. Get a book that you like; there are hundreds of ways to get somewhere. This summer we went as an inch worm. We got there from Lionni's *Inch by Inch*. We happened to have a large green tent, so we picked up the green tent and made a huge inch worm and twenty children went various places around the camp responding fully to the content of a book.

A second kind of oral reading that teachers rarely do with children is the reading of excerpts from adult books that the teacher has read. *The Donner Party* by George Keithley is about the attempt to cross western American plains and the cannibalistic catastrophe in the Donner pass as the winter set in. Much of the book I would not read to children orally because it is beyond their interests. However, I started to read *The Donner Party* during sustained silent reading this summer. I just couldn't put it down and I said to myself, these children that I'm sitting among are eight and nine and ten years old, but this is one of those books that you share with children. We must share our adult books with children. As teachers we must read enough and respond regularly enough to language and to ideas in books so that we demonstrate that books have meaning to adults. We say by our actions, "Children, you can go places in this world if you learn to read. You can go into a world of ideas. Listen to how ideas can be expressed." I felt a little trepidation as I read *The Donner Party* to the children, but I read. When I finished, I didn't say anything, we just dismissed. The next day I read a little more during sustained silent reading and at the end of sustained silent reading I said, "Would you like to hear another episode?" There was about a 50% yes response. I'm delighted if I get one yes. The yes response kids moved to get a little nearer to the lap as we had another chapter. But listen:

Buffalo bathed in the brown river  
widening the water  
while the other half  
of the herd was feeding in a field.

It was a warm June morning,  
even the boys on sentry duty  
sat down on the bank

watching the dung-colored cows  
wallow in the water  
that flooded around their flanks

so we weren't prepared  
when the young Pawnee  
came into camp . . .

Some wore paint smeared  
down their cheeks  
and they were careful

to shave  
the whole head except a scalp-lock,  
a single shock of hair on top of the skull

to which they tied  
a thatch of hair taken from the tail  
of a deer and dyed blood-red.

Every brave  
had brought his rifle  
and wanted to prove his skill

They killed nine or ten more.  
Some people prefer  
the tender tongue.

We cut whatever part  
we felt we could cook—  
the hump behind the skull

and the huge hump ribs  
and the side ribs too,  
we wanted to try it all.

So we went out to a tall patch  
of prairie grass to see them shoot  
(you could hardly call it a hunt at all)

and they knelt down as one by one  
each man put on a wolf skin,  
a complete pelt

from head to tail  
long enough to cover  
his body when he bent over.

Almost at once  
the indian acquired  
a queer kind of innocence

as though he had lost  
the gift of reason  
and in its absence

he looked a little  
less stiff than  
the rest of us,

seeming to move  
more like an animal  
that must follow its feelings.

His lower legs still showed  
and his hairless  
human hands hung out.

The head of the wolf hid the bald  
skull of the man inside.  
Under its jaws his eyes glowed.

This was a disguise he wore  
to make the buffalo  
ignore him as if

he was a wolf  
who came around to clean  
the carcass of a dead cow . . .

They filled their rifles now  
and fell on all fours and crawled  
away like wolves in the waving grass.

While the sun beat down on us  
the buffalo bent eating the green wind  
in which their faces disappeared.

The hunters on their hands and knees  
approached the herd and not one was seen.  
When they shot a big cow our children cheered!<sup>2</sup>

I won't go on, but I did read more to the children. The mind needs stretching and if the children didn't understand everything, they still heard a rich language that may have made some infinitesimal impression on their brains that may be recalled ten years later in some usable form.

You just know when children sit still and listen that they're enjoying language and books.

I like to use books like *What Can You Do With a Shoe?* When you do, you get responses whether you want them or not?

What can you do  
What can you do  
What can you do  
With a shoe?<sup>3</sup>

You need pictures to read three quarters of the story, but I'm not a picture shower. Each person develops his own style of using books. If the children can see the book, fine; if they can't see a book, fine, because the words should conjure up images in the mind that are even better than the book's illustrations. And if the children have liked the book, just as soon as I've put it on the table or shelf they will find out how the artist viewed each scene. That is what I want them to do. I don't want the book to be finished when I'm finished with it; I want it to be just started.

What can you do  
What can you do  
What can you do  
With a shoe?  
You can put it on your ear  
On your beery leery ear,  
You can put it on your ear tra-ia  
Or wear it on your head  
Or butter it like bread  
Or use apple jam instead, ha ha.  
Oh, stop all that nonsense,  
What do you really do with shoes?

I had the most delightful experience this summer reading this to Quinault children. One of the things I can say about children from our summer experience is that children are children. Their work and their responses indicate that they're children—not Indian children or deprived children or disadvantaged children—just children. One thing we've done with our so-called disadvantaged children is to pretend that they are different in their basic likes or basic needs and thereby made them disadvantaged because we then read them only books for the disadvantaged. *What Can You Do With A Shoe* was one of the Quinault children's favorite books.

You can see how it was written for kids who live in isolation on a reservation, because there is a bear in it.

What can you do  
What can you do  
What can you do  
With a chair?

You can pretend you're a bear saying *boo* in a zoo  
Or a seasick kangaroo (now the chair is a canoe)  
Or use it for a table  
When you're sitting on the floor  
Or if you're able  
Shove it up against the door  
So *nobody* can get in unless you say so.  
Or it's an aeroplane  
Or a train  
And you're going on a journey for the moon

Now really! Is that what you're supposed to do with a chair? What do most people do with chairs?

The children responded every time there was a pause because they knew what you do with chairs. I have to skip a bit.

What can you do  
What can you do  
What can you do  
With a bed? Paint it red! paint it red, yellow, blue  
And paint the covers too!  
Paint purple, orange, brown on it  
And then jump up and down on it! Oh no, no! no!  
What are beds really for? That's right! Good night . . . Sleep tight!

One child, who had heard this book and understood it, responded to it as he sat at the breakfast table with a coal black foot from having walked in or near the coal bin. He put the foot, plunk, on the table, took a knife and leaned over as only an agile infant can do without hurting his back, managed to hit the butter with some staying on his knife, and proceeded to butter his toes. His father, having read psychology books about ignoring unwanted behavior, ignored this until the toe was, as you must guess, inserted in the mouth and licked off. When father screamed, "Stop it," the little face looked up, and out of the mouth of that face came the phrase, "or you can butter it like bread," to which the father responded, "Don't paint the bed." Both laughed as a truce was declared. Books are to be used as a part of life.

You get children responding to spring or springtime with books like *The Marsh Crone's Brew*:

In the summer when the sun goes down behind the marshes, and

evening sets in, a kind of white vapor sometimes rises from the swampy ground. People say it's the marsh crone brewing. Do you really know what she is doing? This is the story of the marsh crone's brew although I don't know if it's completely true. One evening the marsh crone sniffed the air. Now it's time to brew, she says. She has a special cauldron. And she calls all her children to help. The marsh boys are regular little scamps. They run and play all night long and never lie down. They pull the tail fins of carp and frighten ducks who want to sleep. Sometimes the boys forget what time it is until the sun rises and shines on them. Marsh people can't stand the sun and have to go underground. The boys can't get all the way under and their feet stick up. In the day time people say there are some old black branches. The branches are boys' feet. They stay till night comes again, then they jump up and play again. During the day the marsh people sleep down in the mire and snore. So bubbles come up through the water. Surely you've seen those bubbles. There are marsh girls, too. Some of them aren't very big. All of them are sweet, all have masses of hair on their heads and they never comb it. When they want to sleep, they just sit down. Then the people say those are hillocks. But they are girls' hair. It doesn't matter if you step on them, they're very sturdy. As the marsh crone brews, many good things go into the cauldron.

Here's one place you can stop if you want to and spend an hour discussing "What do you put into a marsh crone's cauldron to make brew?" even though in probably half the schools in the United States if you ever talked about making brew you'd be fired. She uses

Moonlight, sunset glow, dandelions, and rooster's crow. Willow spears, evening dew, foxes' ears and leeches' spew. All of this she mixes with the waves of water and the angles from angle worms and the cats from cattails. She also uses stork feathers and spider web and mosquito egg shells and the stringy root of money wart. And all that sort of thing.

If you want a lesson in comprehension, ask "What does *thing* refer to?"<sup>4</sup> You could spend hours thinking about *thing* if you wanted to. So frequently we say to a child, "What are you doing? Get your eyes on the book. You're looking away. You're not reading." It would be ever so delightful if the child would look at the teacher and say, "I am so reading. I'm thinking."

This puts me in mind of a digression that I can't afford to omit. I was giving a test this spring. It was in Sharon Smothers' classroom in Ferndale. It was one of the most delightful responses I've ever had to the *Standard Reading Inventory* test as I administered it. I said to the child, "Would you read these words on the word list for me? I'll show them to you one at a time." He looked at me incredulously, and said,

"Read a word list! Who would ever read a word list?" And I said, "Can you pronounce the words on the word list?" He said "Yes, but who would ever read a word list?" Sharon Smothers' class is one where children know they can read books, and they are reading books, and are understanding books, and are using books, and are responding to books before they get to that odious step of word recognition, which is not odious if you already like books.

What I have been talking about is the development of (1) a love of books, (2) understanding of books, and (3) recognition of words as the traditional way of teaching reading, even though you may not recognize it. I don't have it in the traditional sequence. In traditional reading lessons, word recognition comes first, comprehension is second, and then somewhere down at the end of the manual lesson there's something about appreciation of books and getting children to like books. As hurried, overwrought teachers, we all skip that last part because there's so much to do to get children to recognize words and to drag the comprehension out of the children. If you can accept that the proper progression for learning to read is loving books first, understanding and responding to books second, and recognizing words third, then most of your word recognition problems will disappear. Your reading readiness program is right in front of you. Anytime you sit down it is made by your two legs. Get those "unready" children on your lap, and they'll get off your lap when they're ready. Get children speaking, get them thinking; you do the listening. Get them recording their ideas in some form, even in a three dimensional form of modeling clay or a diorama. Get them writing and they will read in the sense of recognizing words.

You introduce books like *Apartment No. 3* by Ezra Jack Keats. My wife, Marlene, said to me, "Are you really going to play your harmonica?" and I said, "I don't know if I'm going to or not." But if Sam can play the piano, I can at least use my harmonica.

The rain fell steadily.  
It beat against the windows,  
softening the sounds of the city.  
As Sam gazed out, he heard someone  
in the building playing a harmonica.  
It filled him with sad and lonely feelings  
like the rain outside.  
He had heard that music before.  
Each time it was different.<sup>5</sup>

So we play some different sounds and children have one more experience in their brains' storehouse with which to read the words in a book when they get around to recognizing words.

We take a book like *Poems and Verses About The City*; we want children to be interested in poetry. I guarantee that if you merely stand up and read this, even badly, in grades 3-8 (I'm not sure it'll work in grades 1 and 2), by afternoon the bus driver will be driven crazy by the kids' reciting this poem on the way home.

#### LADIES AND JELLY SPOONS

Ladies and jelly spoons:  
I come before you  
To stand behind you  
And tell you something  
I know nothing about.

Next Thursday,  
The day after Friday,  
There'll be a ladies meeting  
For men only.

Wear your best clothes  
If you haven't any,  
And if you can come  
Please stay home.

Admission is free,  
You can pay at the door.  
We'll give you a seat  
So you can sit on the floor.

It makes no difference  
Where you sit;  
The kid in the gallery  
Is sure to spit.<sup>6</sup>

And the children become hooked on poetry, because as they go right and left from "Ladies and Jellyspoons" in *Poems and Verses*, they discover a bunch of similar poems. As they get farther away from "Ladies and Jellyspoons" they'll discover they like poetry. The book was published for primary grades. I'm sure it'll work in primary grades and it also works fantastically well in junior high school because it gives kids in junior high school a reason for opening a book that is an easy book. They discover a whole world of poetry they can read and respond to. It's not beyond their ken; they can read it.

Marlene and I used *Bread and Jam for Frances* this summer with the Quinault children. Listen to its beautiful start.

It was breakfast time,  
and everyone was at the table.

Father was eating his egg.  
Mother was eating her egg.  
Gloria was sitting in a high chair,  
and eating her egg too.  
Frances was eating bread and jam.

"What a lovely egg!" said Father.  
"If there is one thing I am fond of for breakfast,  
it is a soft-boiled egg."

"Yes," said Mother, spooning up egg for the baby,  
"it is just the thing to start the day off right."

"Ah!" said Gloria, and ate up her egg.  
Frances did not eat her egg.  
She sang a little song to it.

She sang the song very softly:  
I do not like the way you slide,  
I do not like your soft inside,  
I do not like you lots of ways,  
And I could do for many days  
Without eggs.<sup>7</sup>

Frances eats bread and jam and eats it all the time. We took the children and picked blackberries. We built fires and we made bread on a stick and we ate it, not with the jam because between the time the bread got made and the jam got made, even though the best of lesson plans said that these two would coincide, there was a gap of about 28 hours. There was no bread left when the jam was ready. But we ate bread and we ate jam and the children read and reread and sang *Bread and Jam for Frances*. No doubt this is another book written especially for "disadvantaged" children who live on reservations surrounded by raccoons! Lest my facetiousness be misunderstood, let me state unequivocally that *books have a power. Books are wonderful when they speak from the heart to the mind. "Disadvantaged" children under every guise have both hearts and minds. We seem to have forgotten this. Particularly we seem to have forgotten that they have minds.*

Your job as a teacher is to be concerned with the thinking of each child, the inspiring of thinking, setting the kind of classroom which permits thinking, encourages thinking, and demands thinking. It is on this last issue that so many teachers have given up, because they have been told that children have low IQs or are disadvantaged. We discovered that the school records of about six of our summer children said, "Mentally retarded, incapable of learning anything, incompetent," or words to that effect because on the Frostig Tests they couldn't stay within the lines, or didn't care to, or because on the IQ tests they didn't

respond, or didn't care to. And here are those same children making jam, sitting and reading *Bread and Jam for Frances*, responding and drawing and working and creating and talking and behaving in hundreds of ways that make them seem totally bright, creative, happy youngsters who love learning something. Here are these children saying about school, "I don't do anything in school because in school I am dumb." In school they fulfill the label because the teacher believes the label and therefore teaches little and expects nothing. The labeling that occurs is not damaging in itself; it is how we feel about the label.

One of my most delightful experiences, one that I cannot fully relate today, was with the dumb reading group. The dumb reading group was one of the best reading groups I ever watched. The kids called themselves the dumb reading group because that's what they were, dumb readers, but not dumb human beings. They had chosen the label themselves because they said it was appropriate. They particularly liked to be called forward when a strange adult was in the room, just to watch the adult's face. I was subjected to this the first time I went into the room. "Will the dumb reading group come forward," commanded the teacher. It was so much better than "Will the Bluebirds (or the Toads or John's group) come forward." Being a dumb reader had no more stigma in that class than "dumb bridge player" or "dumb golfer," because the children were learning.

I have a speech I've been giving the last year or so, the point of which is that there is clear research evidence, if you want to read the research my way, that says that the major reason kids have not learned to read in school is that the teachers haven't done anything to teach reading because they have believed the tests that say these kids should not be expected to learn. It's a little different wrinkle of the self-fulfilling hypothesis. It's not saying that kids don't learn because you believe the tests. It is saying that the kids don't learn because you don't bother to teach anything. The kids are not slow in learning, although they may be slow in learning how to respond conventionally. This is what I implied by saying I'll read *The Donner Party* to the children and hope that some trace gets stored in their brains to come out in six or eight or ten years. I'm not going to say, "I can't read *The Donner Party* to these children because they are too slow-witted to listen." We must be willing to take the time to allow a child to learn before we demand that he perform. After all, an apple tree doesn't bear fruit immediately.

If I have one message that I want to scream in the State of Washington it's that precision teaching and its constant demand for immediate, measurable performance is going to kill us. Can you imagine the kind of things that must be occurring in classrooms when a child answers the question, "What's reading?" by saying, "It's saying a word list," which is another response I got. "How do you learn to read?" I

asked. "You learn to say words on a word list," "Do you read any books?" I asked. "No, I read words on a word list; that's reading. I did better today because I said 42 words in two minutes. Yesterday I only said 41. *If I can get up to 45 my teacher will get her full pay for the year.*" (I made up the last sentence, but unfortunately not the rest.)

If we want children to become readers, rather than just knowing a large number of isolated unused reading skills, we have got to be doing some things with children that are not immediately measurable. We've got to read to them. If they sit still that's good enough; if they write and express ideas, that's fine. We'll work on the mechanics, too, but they take second place to ideas.

I want to show you some things that first grade children have written when the opportunity to write was given and the teacher was teaching how to write.

#### Summer

Flowers growing. Lots of fun.  
No more snow. I am glad aren't you.  
Cutting grass. Playing grass hockey.  
I got a goal. Blueberrys growing.  
I had some did you?

The lights in the evening.  
The hills how they glow.  
The grass in the evening.  
They glow they glow they glow.

I like rain because I can stick my tung out to get a jrink from the rain. So I can get a cold jrink of rotr. I love roses because they smell pretty. I can pick the roses up and bring them to school. Roses need rain. Roses grow when rain comes down. I love rain. I like my jewellry Box. When I had my Jewelery Box from Santa Claus I was happy. opened my presnts up. When I opened it there was a Jewelery Box. I opened it and I saw a necklace and a ring and earings.

At my house at Christmas there's a kind of happy smell blowing in and out the windows.

That's all first grade writing, every word of it.

What will the textbooks tell you? Correct the speech defect before you allow a child to write, because you can't expect a child with a speech defect to write. Why not? You spell *drink*, *jrink*, if you have a

speech defect and say *jrink*. You spell *water*, *rotr*, if you say *roter*. So what!! You learn to write with a speech defect just as you learn to talk with a speech defect. Think how much worse off children would be if we insisted that they not speak until they spoke correctly. No child would speak. They'd never get a chance to learn.

If you teach a child to encode and write you will never have to teach him to decode; you will never have to teach him a single word recognition skill. Just teach him to write. If you want to know how to teach him to write there are 40 pages of step by step teaching of phonics and writing in *Reading Is Only The Tiger's Tail*. Throw out the blending and decoding phonics, the nonsense that supposedly teaches word recognition. No child ever used it that way and nobody ever should.

If you want kids in the first grade to write, you require them to write every day, and you teach them to write. You just tell them to do it. It's a requirement. "Here's a blank page. Write in it. That's your assignment for today." They write and you answer in writing. That is what a kid wants when he writes, a response to the content of the writing. He doesn't want you to correct his spelling; you rarely should correct spelling. Children spell correctly as much as they can; they know that they don't know how to spell and they want to learn how to spell, so you teach it eventually, but you don't have to worry about it. Spelling correctly is never given precedence over ideas and the free flow of language, not if children are to *write to read* in order to have the right to read.

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<sup>3</sup> Beatrice Schenk De Regniers. *What Can You Do With A Shoe?* New York: Harper & Row, 1955.

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<sup>6</sup> Donald J. Bissett, ed. *Poems And Verses About The City*. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1968.

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## YOU, A CREATIVE READER

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"You, a Creative Reader." If you infer from the three elements in the title that I plan to emphasize both you and creativity in connection with reading, you probably will guess that (a) I'll try to involve you personally in some way of thinking about the complex business of reading and (b) we'll stress originality of thinking as opposed to accuracy, analysis and evaluation. Also, I should add that I am considering reading in its broadest sense so that the term includes pre-reading experiences and visual literacy.

When I began my teaching career some seventeen or eighteen years ago, I recall very well the battle that was being waged publicly over why Johnny couldn't read. At that time the sides were designated as the "look-say" approach and the "phonics" approach. Matters are more complicated in the reading field these days, and I doubt if it would be accurate to say the battle lines are drawn up with just one group of advocates on either side. Nevertheless, the problems of teaching reading are still the most serious in the instructional program of any elementary teacher. In all likelihood they will remain so in our time and also in our great grandchildren's time.

Consider, for example, the problems of Mr. Mellowing, a hypothetical person based on real people. Of the three seventh-grade teachers in his junior high school who taught literature, Mr. Mellowing was considered the most erratic and disorganized. He was always trying out new ideas—invariably his own ideas—and sometimes they were flops. On the other hand, none of the other seventh grade teachers in the school was so successful in exciting pupils.

Youngsters in Mr. Mellowing's classes frequently were enthusiastic about subjects that seemed to have little to do with English literature. His pupils were concerned not only with studying the stories, poems, and essays of literary greats of the past; they were greatly interested in all kinds of writing, including their own. Sometimes, as a result of browsing in the wide selection of books, magazines, and newspapers available in Mr. Mellowing's class, a pupil became interested in a subject which was considered not only beyond the scope of the course, but also as improper subject matter for a seventh grader. (Among these subjects investigated were the role of the United States in maintaining dictatorships in the Caribbean and in Latin America, misconduct in the Senate, illegitimacy among teenagers, and exploitation of American Indians.) The criticisms of others, however, had little apparent effect upon Mr. Mellowing's teaching practices. He continued to encourage

pupils to read broadly and to try to understand the problems and issues they found in their reading.

Among the assignments and projects contrived by Mr. Mellowing during the two years he managed to remain in the junior high school were these:

#### *Shorter Assignments in Fiction*

Reread a story from the point of view of the author; then retitle it.

Read a myth or fable; then rewrite it, giving it a modern setting.

Reread the story imagining that you are one of the characters reviewing the action on his death bed. Write down what you might say to someone by your side.

Write a few paragraphs about the merits and demerits of the story from the point of view of your parent.

#### *Poetry*

Reread a poem, imagining that you are a composer of music and that you will write a musical score to accompany a reading of the poem. Describe the kinds of music you would want as background for the various parts of the poem.

Read another poem by the same author and compare the two poems with regard to vocabulary and rhyme scheme. Report your observations and comment upon the author's diction and rhyming.

Reread the poem; then write a parody of it.

#### *Biography*

Reread a biography, looking for critical events in the life of the subject. Explain why they were critical.

Read a biography about somebody from the past; then compare the subject to a modern-day figure, noting marked similarities and differences.

#### *Essays*

If an appropriate essay can be found in an inexpensive paper-

back edition, "read with a pencil." Carry on a conversation or a debate with the author by writing on the printed pages (making notes in the margins, challenging the author with questions and statements at the top and the bottom of the page).

### *Miscellaneous*

Read a story; then dramatize a scene which is well liked or important.

Revise the ending of the story and present the new version in written or dramatic form.

Sketch or paint individuals or scenes from the story.

Construct a model of a structure or of a city featured in the story.

Make a clay model of one or more of the characters in the story (or of an animal in the story).

Draw a map of the area in which the action of the story takes place. Use commercial maps to help you if the story is laid in a real-life place; use your imagination as well as commercial maps to help you if the locale is fictional.

Create a comic strip which is based on the characters or situations in the story.

Design a poster or newspaper advertisement which (1) fits in with the story's plot or (2) might persuade someone to read the story.

Write a jingle or song which is based on the characters of the story.

Put on a puppet show which features characters from the story (or similar characters).

Make a mural depicting scenes from the story.

Guess what the author might be like, solely by how he wrote the story. Then read about the author and see how close you came in your guessing.

What do you think of the kinds of assignments Mr. Mellowing gave

his pupils? Do you think he fosters creativity?

We often talk about the first step of the creative process as having to do with a feeling of discomfort. Unless I am badly mistaken, this is a chronic condition of teachers, especially with regard to reading problems. One way you might get a different perspective of your problems in helping children acquire and develop reading skills is to think of yourself as a magical person. We won't imagine that the world is magic or wonderful—it will be just the same kind of world as you know it to be now. But imagine yourself to have magical powers. What would you change in order that all of your pupils become more efficient, insightful, and creative in their reading? Why don't you give some thought to being a wonderful, omnipotent reading teacher now by responding to the following questions?

*You, The Magical Reading Teacher?*

If you had magical powers, what would you do to improve your reading program?

\*What materials would you make easier so that your slowest readers would read more eagerly?

\*What materials would you make simpler so that your slowest readers would read more readily?

\*What materials would you make more exciting so that your pupils would not become bored?

\*What materials would you make longer so that your pupils would become more involved in their reading?

\*What materials would you make more colorful so that your pupils would find them more interesting?

\*What materials would you make less expensive so that all of the children in your classes might have ready access to them?

\*What facilities in your school would you change or acquire so that children would want to read?

\*What facilities in your school would you change or acquire so that children could be more comfortable when they read?

\*What would you change in yourself in order to become a better reading teacher?

Which of the problems represented by the questions above concerns you most? Why?

Are some of these questions really trivial? Would they have been more appropriate fifteen years ago when we didn't have so many exciting books, magazines, pamphlets, and other reading materials available to us?

Obviously I have included the above exercise for a reason. One of the ways for us to be creative and original in solving our problems is to be confronted with a series of questions like those above. Likewise, we can help children to become more creative in their problem solving by providing them with a series of questions that require them to arrive at new and different ideas, either in small groups or as independent thinkers.

Torrance<sup>2</sup> has offered some interesting suggestions for helping children become more motivated to read and, after they begin reading, to become more imaginative readers. He recommends that before a reading experience:

1. Pupils be confronted with ambiguities and uncertainties.
2. Anticipation and expectation be heightened.
3. The familiar be made strange and the strange be made familiar by analogy.
4. Pupils be encouraged to look at the same thing from several different psychological, sociological, physical, or emotional points of view.
5. Pupils be confronted with provocative questions requiring them to examine information in different and new ways.
6. Pupils be required to make predictions based upon a limited amount of information.
7. Tasks be structured only enough to give pupils clues and direction.
8. Pupils be encouraged to "take the next step beyond what is known."

Torrance recommends further that during a reading experience:

1. There be a continued heightening of anticipation and expectation.

2. Pupils be encouraged to be creative and constructive rather than assume a cynical acceptance of limitations.
3. Pupils' awareness of problems be heightened.
4. Pupils be encouraged to explore missing elements and possibilities systematically and deliberately.
5. Apparently irrelevant or unrelated elements be juxtaposed.
6. Mysteries and puzzles be explored and examined.
7. Ongoing predictions from limited information be made as new data are acquired.
8. Surprises be heightened and deliberately used.
9. Visualization of events, places, and characters be encouraged.

He also recommends that after a reading experience:

1. Ambiguities and uncertainties be played with.
2. Constructed responses be encouraged (e.g. a better way, a more beautiful effect, and so forth).
3. Digging deeper and going beyond the obvious be encouraged.
4. Elaborating some element through drawings, paintings, dramatics, imaginative stories, and the like be encouraged.
5. Pupils be encouraged to search for elegant solutions (that is, the solution that takes into account the largest number of variables).
6. Experimentation and testing of ideas be encouraged.
7. Future projections be encouraged.
8. Improbabilities be entertained.
9. Multiple hypotheses be encouraged.
10. Pupils be required to reorganize or reconceptualize information.
11. They be encouraged to synthesize diverse and apparently unrelated elements.

12. Pupils be encouraged to test and revise their predictions.
13. Pupils be encouraged to transform and rearrange information and other elements.
14. Pupils be encouraged to "take the next step beyond what is known."

Torrance believes that the prime motivator underlying these strategies is *incompleteness*. His findings—and my own—have shown that being able to complete something is sufficiently satisfying to a young reader that he or she does not need any extrinsic rewards. The trick often comes in finding problems and questions that children of varying backgrounds and abilities can successfully complete. However, we have found that it is not necessary to "write down" to a less-than-average level of intelligence in order to involve all of the youngsters in a given class. If materials are developed that encourage the child to draw from his own experiences and it is understood that his personal experiences are as legitimate as anyone else's, virtually every child in a given group will respond enthusiastically. The big advantage in using materials such as these is that there are no right or wrong answers. When that threat is removed, children who regularly withdraw or who rarely contribute ideas will surprise their teachers with spontaneous and often insightful reactions.

Fresh, unexpected responses from classroom activities often delighted three Portland, Oregon, teachers who recently administered exercises from *Stretch*<sup>1</sup>. Here is an example of some exercises that require the child to reflect upon some earlier childhood experiences and come up with honest responses. In this exercise, "Sue Swings," the child is simply asked to recall a time when he or she was able to perform a skill whereas previously it had seemed impossible. The pupil is asked: "Why didn't Sue want to use the swing at first?" Whether brilliant or slow, every child has had the experience of fearing failure or embarrassment. We have found that children respond openly to this question.

Then the pupil is asked to guess why Sue decided to get on the swing several months after her frightening initial experience with a swing. My oldest child had a number of frustrating experiences trying to learn to ride a bicycle. Over a period of several months, he and I struggled to help him acquire the skills necessary to balance, pedal, and steer, unaided by a puffing father. On one memorable occasion he ended up among the rose bushes on his way down from the top level of a two-level backyard. Then one morning without any forewarning—at least four months after those painful skirmishes with the bike—he got up and casually rode the two-wheeler all over the neighborhood. We

asked him how he had acquired his skills so suddenly, and he replied that he had dreamed he had ridden his bike that night and so he just got up and made the dream come true.

The last two questions put to the pupil in this exercise are open-ended, as are all of the ones preceding them: "Have you ever had trouble learning to do something? What was it?" It is obvious that the so-called "slow learner" can respond as readily—or more readily—to this question as children who are graded more highly by their teachers and by the test makers. Even so, "average" children and "bright" children certainly can respond to this probe in revealing and provocative ways. The experience of anticipating failure, experiencing it, and then overcoming it is common to all. The greatest literature—for adults and for juveniles—is successful because it calls up emotions that are universal.

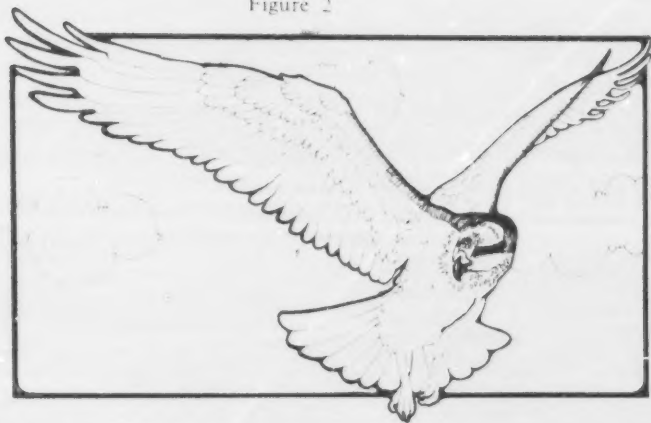
Here is another exercise from *Stretch*<sup>1</sup> that the children in the Portland classes seemed to enjoy (See Figure 1). The exercise, "Birds," appeals to the whimsical in a child. Again, the questions do not threaten the pupil. He is asked to think of each of the birds as personalities: "Do you think it is a friendly bird?" "What name would fit this bird?" "Which of the three birds do you like best?" Because the artist has provided the child with three rather ridiculous creatures, this exercise bears very little resemblance to more threatening kinds of tasks; and consequently the child feels more free to respond and is more likely to think more honestly.



Figure 1

Illustrations are often used to introduce reading. A favorite device of teachers is to show a group of children the cover of a trade book before it is read aloud to them, asking the children to speculate about the characters, setting, and plot as a result of what they can see in the cover illustration. Similarly, children are often asked to interpret in writing the action in a color illustration or photograph. Their stories,

Figure 2



when completed in a readable form, are shared; and this technique, according to Roach Van Allen and John Downing, is one of the most powerful in encouraging children to read for pure enjoyment. However, illustrations can inhibit as well as facilitate the creative energies of children. For example, compare the detailed, naturalistic drawings of birds in Figure 2 with the ones in Figure 1. Although you may disagree, I believe that while these technically superior drawings excite the imagination, they say too much. The other drawings, being fanciful and incomplete, allow for greater creativity in thought.

Let me say, in summary, that creative reading to me means *doing something* with what one reads. And so it is my hope that somehow something you have read or heard during the five days of this conference will inspire you to *do something* with what you read. At the simplest level, this might mean that you take an article, handout, diagram, illustration, or book and read it with imagination. Or it might mean that you add your own ideas to those of an author. At a greater level of involvement, it might be that you will transform or rearrange ideas that you read into terms that will help you solve your instructional problems. It may be that you will "take off" on some idea that has been presented, going a good ways beyond what you have read, and come up with some original solutions to the problems you face in helping children become more effective thinkers and better persons through their ability to read.

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This paper is based largely on the ideas presented at the Sixth Annual Reading Conference by Dr. Lyman C. Hunt, Jr., who is Director of the Reading Center at the University of Vermont.

## INDIVIDUALIZED READING

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Much of what Lyman Hunt said at the conference has already been published in one journal or another. Therefore, it will be my purpose in this paper to summarize briefly some of the ideas presented and to provide a brief bibliography to be utilized by the interested reader.

Hunt<sup>4</sup> maintains that there are six steps to the Individualized Reading Program (IRP). In discussing his six steps, he offers many experience-based suggestions to help teachers who are beginning IRP to avoid some of the stumbling blocks.

His six steps or six areas of concern are:

1. Classroom environment--an atmosphere for productive reading, reading.
2. Silent or quiet reading time--how to behave in reading class, behave in reading class.
3. Instructional guidance--principal of non-interference, of non-interference.
4. Book talks and conference time--what should or should not be, time--what should or should not be.
5. Skill Development: USSR--the epitome of reading skills, USSR--the epitome of reading skills.
6. Records and evaluations--for benefit of learner (p. 27), evaluations-- for benefit of learner (4:27).

Developing the atmosphere for productive reading in the classroom is essential for an effective program. Most children's previous reading instruction (instruction in other areas, too, for that matter) has been primarily teacher directed. In IRP the child is expected to become considerably more self-directive.

One of the major reasons for failure of some IRP programs seems to have been the *assumption* that children could work independently. Most children need careful, deliberate guidance in becoming independent. Developing independent learners requires, at least, teacher patience, high teacher expectations, and careful step-by-step evaluation. The emphasis needs to be put on each child's productivity. "Have you done a good job of reading today?" "Did you get a lot done today?" "Let's stop our work and talk about what we are doing." "What can we

do to make our reading period more productive?"<sup>3</sup> Developing independence requires "Instructional Guidance" and for certain children it might require considerable teacher direction. With guidance, children are expected to become productive. This atmosphere develops often as a result of USSR: Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading. When the only acceptable behavior in the classroom is silent reading, children soon learn not to interrupt others and to become engrossed in their own books (See McCracken<sup>6</sup> for a description of the procedures for USSR.)

One of the central features of IRP is the conference (either one-to-one or several-to-one), and there are a couple of pitfalls that Hunt suggests the teacher should avoid. One is the compulsion to "check on" everything the child reads. This has often resulted in frustrated teachers. There is no way for a teacher to check everything the children read if the children are reading. Nor can the teacher expect to have read all the books that the children are reading. This causes difficulties for many teachers when it comes to talking with children about books. A relatively painless way around this apparent dilemma is to use broad, general questions to start the conversation about a book. Listed below are some sample questions that have been suggested by Hunt<sup>1,2</sup>.

Was this a good book for you to read? Could you tell what was happening all the time?

Was this book hard or was it easy for you to read? What made it hard? or, easy?

Were there places where you got mixed up? or, Were there places where you didn't understand? and, if so, How did you straighten yourself out?

Was this a good book? If "Yes," how good? Did something happen in the book that you would like to have happen to you? Would you like to have been there and taken part in it?

Did something happen in the book that you would *not* like to have happen to you? Reading about it was fun, but you would not want to be there yourself.

What do you think the person who wrote this book was trying to say to you?

Did this book tell or teach you something important that you did not know?

How real (imaginary) is this book?

Show how the writer made this a \_\_\_\_\_  
book. (humorous, mysterious, adventurous, life-like)

A general question of this sort should get a response from a child. The responsibility of the teacher, then, is to listen to the response of the child. After a general question, the teacher's next question can be more specific and can be based on the child's response. This generally leads to a conversation about the child's book, rather than a question-answer "quiz session."

The focus in the conference should be on the expression of the important ideas in the reading with an emphasis on the child's thinking about, and beyond, the reading. We are not interested only in what the child has read, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, what he thinks about what he has read and how he can use what he has read.

Hunt<sup>4,5</sup> also makes an important point about record-keeping. It is imperative that records be kept. It is imperative that those records show some of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual child and the growth he has been making. But it is also imperative that the record-keeping does not take over the program, and they must always be made and kept with the objective of the child's growth clearly in mind.

These are only a few of the important issues dealt with by Dr. Hunt during the conference. Obviously, in this brief article I cannot present the whole of Individualized Reading, but that was not my intent. The reader who wants to study IRP more carefully is encouraged to make good use of the articles listed in the bibliography, as well as the bibliographies to be found in those articles.

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## USING THE BEST OF ALL APPROACHES FOR TEACHING READING

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All of us are quite aware, reading may be taught by many different approaches<sup>1</sup>. Among those currently being used in various parts of the country are the language-experience approach, individualized reading, initial teaching alphabet, programmed instruction, basal materials, and programs with primary emphasis on decoding, labeled by the publisher as "linguistic approach." If you were to attend the annual meeting of the International Reading Association, you would find sessions devoted to each of these approaches along with still others. In fact, I understand that the disciples of several of these approaches are organizing into groups or associations where the devotees may meet and talk with each other about the merits of the cause they espouse. I am sure that if one were to listen to the proponents of each of these approaches or to read the literature in professional journals written by the same people, he would be duly confused, for each would lead one to believe that it is only through one approach, used almost according to a prescribed formula, that a child has a chance to succeed in reading—be he a first-grader or a sixth-grader.

Each of those who speak in favor of a given approach is able to quote studies that show its merits in pupil achievement, interest in reading, number of books read and the like. Usually the speaker fails to show that there are also studies that show values accruing from quite a different approach.

Reported in 1967 by Bond and Dykstra<sup>3</sup> were the results of a comprehensive, nationwide study into the effectiveness of various approaches to reading as determined by results at the end of grade one. This study, known as the Cooperative Research Program in First-Grade Reading Instruction, was made up of 27 separate studies, each designed to ascertain the effectiveness of different approaches to first grade instruction or to assess the merits of various grouping plans. The 27 separate studies were combined into one composite study so that one could compare and cross compare various approaches as carried out by different teachers in different geographic areas.

To make a very long story short, the results of this study showed that "no one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively [p. 123]." This was not the first piece of research that had arrived at this conclusion. In fact many of us said that we would use a million dollars of government money

(this was a federally funded program) to prove what we already knew. Incidentally some of these studies were continued through the second and third grades where the results were similar to those for the first.

The study further indicated that a given approach appeared to result in gains, growth, or achievement in that particular area that the program emphasized, but by the same token it showed weaknesses in certain areas not emphasized. For example, the so-called linguistic approaches seemed to show the children as being adept in pronouncing words, but similar superiority was not demonstrated in comprehension.

I might introduce another conclusion from this study that I am not going to develop, but which I think is very important—another thing we already knew but needed a study to verify. That was that it was the teacher in the classroom who appeared to make the difference in pupil achievement rather than materials and methods, and that “to improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials [p. 123].” A perceptive, knowledgeable, well-educated teacher can teach with the McGuffey Readers and show results. A poorly educated teacher will only muddle through with the best of programs.

The generalization to be taken from the Cooperative Studies, and the one I want to use as the point of departure for the rest of this paper, is that the effectiveness of any one approach to reading instruction appears to be increased when it is broadened by the addition of other instructional components. It is hoped that we can find combinations of approaches that will be superior to any one used exclusively and result in balanced reading growth.

A number of authorities voiced this idea even before the Cooperative Study was thought of. The late Dr. W. S. Gray<sup>5</sup>, discussing the group basal approach to instruction and individualized reading, wrote that progress lies not in the adoption of a so-called “single package” solution but in the development of a flexible pattern which utilizes the advantages of both group and individual instruction and the use of both common and diversified materials.

Dr. Emmett Betts<sup>2</sup> wrote as follows with respect to the need for a variable approach to instruction:

Because teachers vary significantly in their administrative abilities, they cannot be regimented into the use of any one plan (of instruction). Furthermore, the adoption of any one plan does not insure pupil development of interests and skills required for successively higher levels of achievement [p. 145].

Said another way, each approach to instruction has both advantages and limitations if used exclusively. If it were possible to identify those features that seemingly contribute to the success of each approach and combine them in some way, it would be logical to assume that the result would be a better system and a better balanced reading program than any one of the systems used exclusively. This, I think, is possible to do, as I shall try to point out.

Possibly, the best single treatment of the advantages and limitations of currently used approaches to reading instruction is that found in Spache and Spache, *Reading in the Elementary School* (1969). The authors discuss in each of four chapters the basal reader, individualized, linguistic, and language-experience approaches. In each case they describe the approach and point out its advantages and limitations as they see them. I am sure that not everyone would agree with their analyses but it is an attempt to look at these four well-known approaches in an objective manner. Those same four approaches we shall use in our analysis.

The *basal reader approach*, better called a structured or organized approach, is built around a series of books or other materials especially suitable for each successive stage of reading development. Such materials have been and are widely used for instructional purposes. For example the Bureau of Applied Social Research<sup>4</sup> reported that a national sample of teachers indicated that 95 per cent of the first grade teachers considered a basal series either "absolutely essential" or "very important." Ninety-five per cent of the teachers in grades two and three, and 88 per cent in grade four or higher indicated the same opinion. A more recent comprehensive study of reading instruction in New England Schools<sup>7</sup> showed that 94 per cent of first grade teachers, and 91 per cent of fourth grade teachers used basal readers "much" in their reading program.

It is rather difficult to generalize concerning the merits and limitations of the basal materials approach because all such programs are not the same. What may be a limitation in one program may be overcome in another. Furthermore many of the limitations of such programs built prior to the 1970 editions no longer hold for the more recently developed programs. In general, one may say that one of the chief advantages of the structured program is the built-in provision for organized, sequential growth in all reading areas toward increasingly higher levels of maturity. Each stage of learning is a readiness stage for subsequent stages, and each level, in turn, is built on the foundation of prior levels. Provision is made for continuous assessment of reading growth through mastery tests for each level as well as through informal assessments. The overriding goal is to make reading a pleasurable and meaningful activity.

Many contend, however, that there is too much structure in basal materials and that the program makes no provision for the varied interests that thirty children may have in grade three, for example. The carefully and rather rigidly controlled vocabulary, particularly on the first grade level, makes for language patterns quite dissimilar to those used naturally by children. Furthermore, because in some programs the materials are organized by grade levels, children may be "locked in" to materials of a given grade where for some, the content may be too difficult, and for others, too easy. Finally, because this is a "pre-packaged" program a teacher may come to look at reading as something to be studied as math or science with children in class from 10:00 to 10:30. Many of the limitations of the structured approach are in the manner in which the program is carried out, though, I am sure, this could be said of any of the approaches.

*Individualized reading* has been on the reading scene for some time. In contrast to the basal program, there is little or no structure, since each child selects from a wide variety of trade books or magazines the one that corresponds to his reading level and meets his particular interest, be the content narrative or expository in nature. This book, then, becomes the content on which reading instruction is based, and through individual and small group conferences the teacher assesses each child's needs and supplies instruction in whatever skill area appears pertinent. Each child progresses at his own rate. Thus, this approach utilizes the personal motives of each child for reading, capitalizes on inner drives, and reinforces the idea that reading is a rewarding activity.

As many teachers have discovered, however, some children are not inherently motivated to seek out reading as a learning activity - the reading smorgasbord has little appeal to them, or speaking figuratively, if they do go to the table they are content to take those items that require little chewing. In other words, this approach lacks the stimulation and challenge that results from situations where children have the opportunity to work with others in content that has been read in common, and where for the teacher, the learning goals are indicated.

Others find that large classes, which are so common today, severely limit the amount of time that a teacher can spend in teacher-pupil conferences. The result is that the brighter children run on their own power, thereby missing the instruction necessary to develop the higher level abilities, while the teacher concentrates on the children who require more of her attention. Obviously, too, this program lacks the guidelines found in the teacher's manual or guide that relate to the timing of the introduction of skills and that contain teaching suggestions designed to promote sequential reading growth.

Like individualized reading the *language-experience approach* as

described in the literature assumes different forms so that one finds it rather difficult to generalize a description common to all programs. This approach conceives reading as part of the communication process and assumes the close relation between speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Unlike either of the two aforementioned approaches which use books, or trade books, language-experience utilizes, as a basis for reading, oral and written expression growing out of the children's own experiences. In the early stages the children discuss their experiences and dictate to the teacher what they want her to write on the chalkboard in the form of a script chart. This, in turn, is read and becomes the content through which early learning-to-read takes place. As soon as the child is able to write his own "stories" he is encouraged to do so, and through charts of service words, picture dictionaries, and the like, the pupils expand their writing and reading vocabularies. Books of various kinds are available as resources but skills are developed more through pupil generalizations than through deductive teaching. On the upper levels the children continue their writing activities, they read in the various content fields, and, in many cases, the teachers move into what closely resembles individualized reading.

Critics of this approach state that reading as a significant learning area receives such an indirect and incidental touch, and depends to such a degree on spontaneous learning that growth toward maturity in reading is limited. I am quite certain that the proponents would disagree, however. The fact remains that stated reading objectives are missing and considerable faith has to be put in the child to profit from his own incidental learning.

Advantages are inherent in this approach, however. The primary advantage is that the child can see the relation between speech, writing, and reading, a concept that is dramatically developed through early script writing, first by the teacher, then by the child. Moreover, the writing that children do serves as a reinforcement for reading, a fact which seems to be aptly borne out by research. The reading content for reading, since it is of the child's own construction and based on his own experiences, deals with familiar concepts and vocabulary, and relates to something that has inherent significance and interest.

Like love, a *linguistic approach* to reading is a many splendored thing. It means so many different things that it is almost impossible to describe. In fact psycholinguists and even some linguists are saying that there is no such thing as a linguistic approach to reading that makes it distinctive. I would certainly agree, in spite of the fact that several publishers widely herald their programs as such. What really exists is a highly structured phonic approach to early reading—and the proponents of linguistics won't agree with that statement. Reading, to some linguists, who are authors of these programs, is essentially a process of

"mirrored speech." Speech is symbolized by letters and words, and the job of the reader is to "decode," to turn the printed symbols back into speech. Meaning is irrelevant or secondary, at least; it is something that teachers must be concerned with but which is not reading. Hence, heavy emphasis is given to letters, sounds, and sound blending—saying the words. "Patterned words" (we used to call them "word families") are heavily stressed. Hence, there is the *ap* pattern which, with consonant additions, gives *rap, sap, cap, hap, dap, snap, flap*, etc. Using patterned words in any kind of story content requires such heavy vocabulary control that on the early levels Dick and Jane's adventures sound as though they were written by Ernest Hemingway.

Now, how to put the jig-saw puzzle together? Can the desirable features of each approach be combined so that the result would be a program stronger than a single approach used exclusively? I think they can.

Let us begin with the basal reader approach to instruction. As I pointed out earlier, one of the major advantages of this program is the built-in provision for organized, sequential growth in all reading areas toward increasingly higher levels of maturity. The fact that such programs are used by some 90 per cent of the primary-elementary teachers is evidence of the importance attached to this and other features of an organized program. This, then, I would use as the base of operations.

I would suggest that we bring in from both the individualized and language-experience approaches the concept that children should progress along the reading growth spiral at rates commensurate with their potential for growth. The fact that a 2-2 appears on the spine of the book does not mean that all children should be held to that book, or should even be in that book, in the second half of the second grade. Levels "5" or "8" or "D" or "F" should have *no relation* to grade or chronological age. For a given year in school, children will be at that place in the spiral of growth determined by their own inherent growth rates rather than where the teacher thinks they would be as determined by grade or age.

Moreover, it is inconceivable to me that one can assume to have a balanced reading program without an opportunity for each child to select books that he wants to read in terms of his own interests and reading level—the strong feature of individualized reading. The difference here, however, is that the children are using books for their own enjoyment or information rather than as the medium of instruction.

As is done in individualized reading, I would want to make provision for teacher-pupil conferences, again not for teaching pur-

poses, but as an opportunity for the pupil to talk about the story he has read, to express his critical reactions to it, and to sense its possible implications for his behavior. It is here that the child and his teacher may share confidences. At times, too, the teacher may hold group "book club" meetings or panel sessions where book sharing enhances the fun of reading. Providing for personal reading brings into the main stream the most important feature of individualized reading, a feature that any sound, well-rounded program cannot omit.

Practices from the language-experience approach can also make their contribution to the eclectic program of which we are speaking. We mentioned one of its strong features as being the use of experiences and experience writing to develop the concept of reading. The concept of reading is so basic that I think we would be remiss if we were to fail to provide for its development, particularly on the readiness level. Many children come into kindergarten and first grade with no idea of what the reading act is. Seeing their spoken ideas become printed symbols which can be turned back into sounds and ideas helps them to understand what reading really means. Nothing that the teacher can do helps develop the reading concept better than the use of experience writing. Vocabulary and oral language development are also concomitant values accruing from experience writing. But having children engage in their own early writing should also be incorporated into the program. In the past we have assumed that writing should be postponed until children had developed a spelling vocabulary, usually not until the second grade. This does not need to be true. Manuscript writing with its circles and straight lines can be taught early as part of the language program and incorporated into the reading activities. Through picture dictionaries and word lists children can copy the words they want to write. Spelling the initial letters of words, or their inflectional endings with blanks drawn for the unknown parts will suffice if the teacher doesn't insist on unrealistic letter-perfect spelling performance at this stage of reading. Evidence seems clear that writing activities reinforce reading, thus, becoming a valuable adjunct to the reading program.

To bring into the eclectic program some of the concepts of the extreme linguistic schools would be extremely difficult. However, I would do one thing that has been done in reading instruction for a long time, later discovered by linguistics and given a new label. I am referring to word building by making use of consonant and vowel substitutions, additions, etc. That is, for example, from the known sight word *look*, the child might derive by substituting initial consonants, the words *took* and *book*. The young reader develops a mental set for looking for familiar elements in unknown words and with his knowledge of sound-symbol relations derives the pronunciation of new words from those he already knows.

Psycholinguists possibly have made the greatest contribution to

reading, since they combine psychology of learning with linguistics. Hence, they are much more realistic in their recommendations. It would be safe to say that any of the reputable structured programs with materials and teaching techniques developed for the 1970's incorporate many psycholinguistic concepts that have improved the programs in material ways. Among these ideas, for example, is one that indicates that reading is essentially a process of reconstructing the writer's message, a search for meaning, and that word recognition strategies are only the means to that end. Rather than drilling and testing for recall of isolated words, evidence of a child's ability to recognize words should be in terms of his ability to comprehend what he reads.

Taking a meaning approach to reading rather than a decoding approach means that the tight vocabulary control of past basal programs is relaxed, and sentence patterns and vocabulary are employed that are more in keeping with those of normal speech. Along with a much more functional approach to phonics and word structure as word recognition strategies, emphasis is given to context, both semantic and syntactic, as practical and useful cues to the recognition of words not instantly perceived as sight words.

What we have now, it appears to me, is a combination of the best features of each of the specialized approaches to reading instruction. As a result we have a program with structure and design, paced according to the individual needs of the children. We have the values of a personal reading program contributing to enjoyment and needed information. We have the advantages of experiences and experience writing that contribute so much to an understanding of the reading act. We have the insights and understandings growing out of the research in psycholinguistics. I believe that this arrangement makes for a stronger reading program than if we were to use any single approach exclusively.

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## PERSONALIZING READING INSTRUCTION

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It is by choice that I would like to discuss *personalizing* rather than *individualizing* reading instruction. The term individualizing has come to mean a particular approach or method of teaching reading where materials of various types are freely selected by the pupils and used as the basis for instruction which is given through teacher-pupil conferences on an individual or small group basis.

Personalizing reading instruction, on the other hand, is not a method of teaching reading, but a way of dealing with children regardless of the method or approach employed. It is the application of the humanistic concept that pupils are persons and should be dealt with in a manner as understanding and personal as we would deal with our own friends or associates. It is the recognition that children, the same as adults, have special needs and interests, rates of learning and spans of attention, moods, good days and bad, and that all of these and many other factors account for the ways they think, work, assimilate and react. Under these conditions the teacher needs to have available a great deal of understanding, consideration, and ability to differentiate treatment and instruction to provide for these varied needs far beyond what one would be concerned with in individualized reading.

Moreover, the term, individualization, subtly emphasizes the differences among individuals, while overlooking the many similarities among children of a given age or grade. As one psychologist says, "Superimposed upon the universal similarities among children are individual variations," a statement that duly recognizes the fact that instruction should capitalize on the many situations for children to work together and relate to each other in ways that will strengthen social understandings and habits. At the same time a program should be sufficiently flexible to permit adjustments of various kinds so that children may work independently or in small groups to provide for their individual variations.

The following are typical situations calling for personalized instruction and guidance:

- ... Harry has a very limited background of understanding in special situations: he has no concept for *cactus*, *lizard*, and *ranch*.
- ... Clarence and three other children can get the stated meaning of a paragraph but have difficulty in comprehending the meanings that lie between the lines.
- ... Cindy, Pat, and Jan were absent when their group learned to alphabetize by the second letter.
- ... Sara begins to show insight into her personal problems after reading de Angeli's, *The Door in the Wall*
- ... Mack has difficulty in identifying the words *point*, *seal*, *float*, and *street*.
- ... When Charles comes to a word he doesn't know he expects the teacher to tell him what it is.
- ... Susan asks if Mr. E. B. White has written other books, besides *Charlotte's Web*.
- ... Polly seems to be aided in her learning when she can listen to a tape recording of the content while she follows along in her book at the same time.
- ... On a given practice page covering the application of an understanding developed in the group session, two children make five errors on a seven-item page.
- ... George is embarrassed in reading aloud because of a severe stuttering problem.
- ... Judy fails to recognize by sight two words that the teacher is sure she taught effectively two days ago.
- ... Millie has a special interest in reading mystery stories.
- ... Carl seems to recall more accurately words met on prior occasions, if he has a chance to use them in writing a story.
- ... Grace, who has been doing well in reading, shows a pronounced decline in interest and performance.
- ... The practice book provides three more exercise pages in the use of the glossary. Shelley and three other children already use in an acceptable manner the skills being practiced.

... Susan asks the teacher the names of some of the books he has read recently and what they were about.

... On a standardized reading test Greg and Bob show similar composite scores. An analysis of the data shows that Bob is above average in the same two areas in which Greg is below, and Greg is high in the two areas in which Bob is low.

In none of these situations is there a change called for in the method of instruction, whatever that method happens to be. Each, however, calls for a differentiated treatment by the teacher, an awareness that certain children are telling the teacher something that will require her personal attention.

How does the teacher become aware of these needs? In a variety of ways:

... by being constantly alert to every response a child makes to a reading situation and sensitive to its meaning.

... by assessing progress frequently using both formal and informal procedures.

... by noting the kinds of materials children select for personal reading and the kind of comments they make about them.

... by observing the kinds and extent of errors children make on practice material.

... by noting how the strategies being taught in the reading period are being applied in other reading situations during the day.

... by observing children to ascertain by which mode of learning each learns best, whether visually, auditorially, kinesthetically, or by a combination of modes.

... by being aware of the many ways that reading contributes to new understandings and insights, to changes in attitudes and behavior.

And then what? Assuming that differentiated needs, interests, concerns, or problems have been identified, just what does the teacher do? What action may she take? Here are some suggestions that many teachers have found successful:

... give extra time in individual or small group work to overcome a problem or deal with a situation before it becomes overwhelming.

- ... give children opportunities to exercise their options in terms of different kinds of activities and satisfy their personal reading interests.
- ... expect the best from each child and give him commendation when he achieves your expectation.
- ... ask of children only what they are able to deliver, thus saving them from embarrassment and humiliation that comes from possible failure.
- ... make the time for reading the most enjoyable time of the day.
- ... attempt to discover the reasons for discouragement, lack of progress, or disinterest, and ameliorate the situation insofar as it lies within your power.
- ... differentiate instruction so that children may capitalize on their particular learning style or modality.
- ... recognize the fact that many times one has to work around a problem, rather than to face it directly.
- ... give children time during the day or week to read, unhampered and unhindered.
- ... give opportunity for children to talk with the teacher and their friends about the books they are reading.
- ... free children from engaging in practice and drill over skills that they already perform adequately.
- ... withhold degrading comments and stern censure when errors occur, but give ample praise when deserved.
- ... be sufficiently acquainted with children's books so that you may tactfully suggest and recommend when requested.
- ... remember that skills, strategies, and competencies, as important as they are to successful reading, are in the final analysis only means by which the child is able to enjoy reading and find it to be a significant and worthwhile activity.
- ... permit children in any given period of time, through fluid and flexible grouping to progress along the spiral of reading development at rates which are commensurate with their capacities for growth, and within that period of time to progress as far as and only so far as sound learning makes possible.

## THE OPEN CLASSROOM AND READING

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The open classroom, informal classroom, or integrated day is the latest "in" plan of school organization currently in use. The movement is difficult to describe because it takes many different forms. For example, one school, flying under the banner of the open classroom, takes a completely different form from another where the personnel claim to be operating under the same concept. In fact one teacher said that the open classroom meant having carpet on the floor.

In its most indefensible form the school operates on the romantic and visionary notion that children should be turned loose to do their own thing, that they will learn to read when they sense the need, and that they will acquire the few simple abilities needed by a mature reader by a process of intuitive discovery. The teacher is merely one who is present to answer questions, if perchance they arise.

In other cases the open classroom concept is an honest and intelligent attempt to overcome many of the problems of education in general and of reading in particular. Because of the importance of reading in our culture the teacher assumes responsibility for its teaching, but hopefully in a much more relaxed and informal atmosphere than that which is found in many classrooms today.

There are changes that are urgently needed to make the reading program more effective and vital. If evidence of this is required we need only to look at the pile-up of handicapped readers in clinics and special reading classes in grades three and four, the number of upper grade pupils who drop out of school as soon as the law permits, and the number of adults who find it necessary to turn to other avenues for entertainment and information because they have never acquired an interest in reading.

Something appears to be wrong, but what? Let me offer the following as examples of practices that detract from a viable reading program:

- ... An overly-rigid reading curriculum with a given amount of content to be covered in a given period of time.
- ... Devitalized, uninspired teaching where neither pupils nor teachers give evidence that reading is an enjoyable activity.

- ... Drill on words and mechanics, especially phonics; undifferentiated use of practice materials; purposeless oral reading.
- ... A basal-bound program, unrelated to a library and devoid of activities that grow out of basal reading and into further reading.
- ... Failure to personalize instruction, giving due consideration to learning rates, styles, and interests.
- ... Worship of test norms; measuring reading achievement in terms of where a child "should" be at a given age or in a given grade.
- ... Dehumanized instruction with over-emphasis of behavioral objectives; stressing solely those features in the program that can be measured and counted.
- ... The study of library skills with only limited use of library, or with no library to use.
- ... Emphasis on personal reading with no time set aside to engage in it.
- ... Absence of relationship between what is done in a reading period and what is done in reading during the remainder of the day.

Is the open classroom concept the answer?

*No*, if—

- ... We assume that the child will learn solely by his own discovery of need and request for assistance.
- ... Instruction is postponed until some inner mainspring alerts the child that it is time to begin learning.
- ... The teacher has no objectives in mind as to what a reading program should do or where it should go.
- ... We assume that children are so innately curious and self-motivated that the teacher's role is completely passive, or where she assumes that the desirable reading environment is one where you "surround the child with books and get out of his way."

*Possibly*, if—

- ... In a friendly, non-threatening reading atmosphere the teacher assumes her role as a *teacher*, fully cognizant of the responsibility she has to a child, his parents, and to society where her objective is

to help the child develop in reading competencies and interests to the limits of his capacity.

... If one couples freedom to learn with responsibility to learn, for

--- how free can a child be if he can't read?

--- how free is he, if in the fourth grade he must be sent to a remedial teacher?

--- how free is he, if as a young adult he can't get or hold a job?

... Children have access to a well-stocked library where they have complete freedom to visit, select a book, read it in part or whole, to talk about books and to consider their implications; where the reward for reading is a good story, exciting information, and new insights and understandings—not gold stars, silver seals, or M & M's.

... The time set aside for reading instruction becomes the most exciting period of the day—where they thrill with excitement over Armstrong's first steps on the moon, laugh over Eddie's plights in Haywood's Eddie stories, and brush a tear when Charlotte, the spider, dies.

... There are various reading activities and materials available from which the child may select in terms of his needs and interests. For example:

--- activity centers

--- excursions and projects

--- audio-visual aids

--- games and puzzles

--- things for the precocious as well as the less advanced.

... In all areas of instruction there are vital and relevant purposes for reading that carry children beyond the restrictions of a single textbook.

... There is an inspired teacher at the helm, who, because reading is important in her life, senses the need to help children see its importance in theirs.

Where is the open classroom? It exists in spirit rather than

structure. In fact it could be the same room with the same four walls with the same teacher as before, but with a spirit and an atmosphere that gives life and vitality to the reading program; a place where children grow both *in* and *through* reading. To me that is what matters.

## READING AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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I would like to call your attention to the report of the NCTE Committee on Children's Literature. The full report titled, "Children's Literature - Old and New" appears in the May, 1964, issue of *Elementary English* (41:455-525, 531). Though not research in the strict sense of the term, the committee's treatment of the entire area of children's literature and their recommendations are such that the full report should be read by anyone having anything to do with this area - and that means all of us, since each of us working with children will be concerned with literature.

Let me refer to several of the committee's conclusions:

1. Children themselves must ultimately be the judge of what constitutes a "good book" for no book is "good" unless children read it and derive satisfaction from it.
2. Give careful consideration to those books that have endured through the years, but evaluate each on the same basis as one would evaluate a modern book. Just because a book is a "classic" does not make it a good book for all children and young people.
3. The values attached to personal reading are of such a nature that no child should be denied the opportunity for a rich literature program.
4. "Was there ever a child who didn't enjoy poetry? . . . I do not know of such a child - except perhaps the one who had no opportunity to know and enjoy it." This speaks for itself as to the importance of poetry in the literature program.

Perhaps the one facet of children's literature that has been subjected to more research than any other has been that having to do with interests manifested by children at various age or grade levels. We know, for example, that the reading interests of boys and girls are relatively similar on the primary grade level. They like stories of animals, of children, of family life, and school life. They like fanciful nature stories, fairy tales and fantasy. As they advance through the

middle grades the interests of the two groups become more disparate, with boys liking sport stories, rugged adventure and content both narrative and factual dealing with animals, while girls prefer stories of home and family life with good narration, mystery and mild adventure. They show the beginning of interest in romantic love. However, as all researchers are inclined to point out, such findings as these refer to pupils of given ages as groups rather than as individuals. Consequently in guiding personal reading there can be no substitute for knowing what each child as an individual prefers, since his interests may not fit the "typical" findings.

Another finding that has particular significance, and one that should not come as anything new, is that reading is in strong competition with television for the young person's time. The Witty studies carried out over a long period of time at Northwestern University show that the average child spends as much time in front of a TV screen as he does in the classroom. In other words, "who's teaching our children?"

The implication of the above finding is obvious. We must make reading compete at least on even terms with television. The procedures for doing this, however, are not so obvious. One suggestion is to provide the richest kind of personal reading program possible so that the child comes to see the difference between passively watching a trite television program which has no enduring qualities and enjoying a quality book in which he can create his own mental pictures of characters and action; where he can feel, taste, smell, and experience.

This is not to say that all TV viewing is wasted time, for there are some programs of real quality — historical drama, specials, concerts, and selected sports events, for example. During the school year the teacher should be aware of these programs, and assign them to be viewed with discussion before and after. Certainly within the context of the language program there should be a yearly unit on television so that the young person comes to understand the place of this important medium within the context of all other recreatory activities.

A number of studies have pointed out the fact that there is a pronounced decline in the amount of personal reading beginning with the upper middle grades. A number of reasons have been suggested for this phenomenon, many of which have implications for the teacher; others lie outside her province. Outside activities—sports, social activities, scouting, homework—are things the teacher cannot do too much about. Others have pointed out that as the school day gets crowded with class activities, personal reading gets crowded out. This the teacher can do something about for if this occurs it may indicate that the teacher is giving it second place in comparison to other activities. On all

levels one of the most rewarding things the teacher can do to encourage personal reading is to provide time during the week for free and unhamp-ered reading.

Other observers contend that in junior high school the reading becomes more prescriptive with book lists and book reports. Thus reading frequently becomes a task, something to be studied rather than something to be enjoyed. If this is true, the implications again are clear. Personal reading, with freedom to exert options and choices, should receive the same amount of emphasis as it did in the primary grades. Evaluative activities, if they are used at all, should be of the type that encourage reading rather than detract from its influence. Moreover, because of the wide range of reading interests and abilities to be found among children at this level, the library must be richly stocked with books and readily available to the reader.

Another interesting area of research deals with the use of literature to modify attitudes, to enrich concepts, and to affect behavior. Findings are in conflict as to whether we can expect these kinds of outcomes from the literature program. They do seem to point in the direction that the chances are rather slight that merely reading a book will have a great influence in bringing about changes of any kind in the reader. Reading plus an opportunity to discuss the book, however, seems to be productive of changes. The discussion may be within a group, if all have read the same story, or if the teacher has read one to the children, or it can be conducted as a teacher-pupil conference over a book read. Though the latter takes additional time it is well worth the teacher's effort since she and the reader are able to discuss the book together. In this way it gives the child an opportunity to sense its implications and to react to its characterization or plot.

A literature program, whether in kindergarten or grade six, must never be thought of as an extra, as the icing on the cake. Fine literature, like fine art or music, enriches the soul and gladdens the heart. Its humanizing influence helps to alleviate the crassness that we find so much a part of today's culture. Good literature is a definite part of each child's heritage.